

THE DIAMOND CROSS

AND HOW I WON IT
BY W. STEPHENS HAYWARD.



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AND
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BY
W STEPHENS HAYWARD,
AUTHOR OF
“EULALIE,” ETC.

WARD, LOCK AND CO.
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THE DIAMOND CROSS, AND HOW I WON IT.

CHAPTER I.

AN ENCOUNTERE. A MYSTERY.

A WOMAN's shriek, shrill and piercing, at night in St. James's Park !

A cold, wet, and miserable March night, such as one would have fancied must have deterred any young, beautiful, and elegantly-dressed lady from being alone on foot in the deserted Mall of St. James's at so late an hour. But such was the lady from whose lips the shriek which ushers in our story issued.

And the cause of that shriek is that she has been rudely seized by two men—not vulgar ruffians, but well-dressed, to all appearance, gentlemen.

Almost instantly another appeared on the scene, and a fierce conflict commenced; and shortly afterwards yet another, making a fourth in all.

Let us see how they came, and the manner in which the desperate struggle being waged was brought about.

Two of these four men came slowly down the Mall in a large carriage, drawn by a pair of powerful horses, driven by a man not in livery, by whose side sat another on the box. Both of these were of forbidding aspect. We will not here stop to describe the two gentlemen in this carriage, as we shall have opportunity in another place, but will be content with saying that both were fashionably dressed; one tall, powerful, and apparently about five-and-thirty years of age; while the other was slighter, and eight or ten years younger. The first and older man was addressed by his companion as Sir Robert; while the latter the baronet called Algernon.

“ You think she’ll come. Do you feel certain that she’ll fall into the trap ? ” asked Sir Robert.

“ Oh, yes; I feel certain. She does not imagine for a moment that we are in London; thinks we are still in Scotland. What a pity it was we let her escape us ! ”

“ Like my d——d luck,” growled Sir Robert; “ but if I do get her to-night I’ll take care she does not slip me so easily. A quarter of a million of money is worth looking after.”

“ Yes; but please to remember my fifty thousand out of it,” put in the other, sharply.

“ All right, all right,” said the other; “ you shall have your money, when I’ve got the bird safely caged. I don’t believe she’ll come, though.”

“ But I’m sure she’ll come. Do you think I don’t know Maude? I think I ought to by this time.”

“ If she does come, then, she’s safe in our hands. These spring iron shutters I have had made especially

for the carriage will effectually prevent any screams being heard, should she prove violent. I have relays of horses all the way to the North, and, once across the border, the law is on my side ; she is mine solely, with her quarter of a million—mine beyond all dispute ; that is to say, if you don't show the white feather at the last moment, and stick to one story and swear to it, and hard to—”

“ Don't fear me : as I'm circumstanced I must have money, I can't stir without it. Must have a good round sum, and fifty thousand will put me all right.”

“ And so must I have money—and I will have money. I'll not be balked of a pretty girl and a quarter of a million without a hard fight for it. This night, if I once get her inside the carriage, the thing is done. She shall be at my place in Scotland in less than a week ; and then neither Lord Chancellor, Archbishop, not royalty even, can wrest my prize my legal property, from me.”

“ Here we are,” cried the other, excitedly. “ Tell him to pull up—I see her.”

The carriage was stopped, and both men leaped out.

* * * * *

Such a night as this might well drive home all who had homes, and such as had not, to places of shelter—as a last resort, even the casual-ward of the workhouse.

And such, indeed, was the effect as regarded pedestrians, for scarce any were to be seen in that lonely Mall of St. James's Park.

One, however, there was who, as he strode sturdily on from Buckingham Gate towards St. James's Palace, seemed to care little either for the rain or gloomy surroundings. He was humming an air, had his hands in his pockets, and by his manner appeared to bid defiance alike to weather and fortune.

There was something in that firm springy tread which denoted energy, resolution, and an enthusiastic temperament—something in the bold front he showed to the rain and drizzle beating in his face, which, to a keen observer, would augur that he would as boldly face difficulty and peril as he did discomfort.

Not that there was anything hard to endure, but it was in the manner with which he faced it—a manner full of self-confidence, pluck—even audacity. And this could be from no necessity or desire to show off, for none but the imaginative eye of the reader is on him as he trudges on, as happy and well contented, it would seem, as though it were a bright summer's night, with a clear, star-spangled sky and balmy air. He was well dressed, though not in the exaggerated height of fashion. His well proportioned figure was enveloped in an overcoat of the sort denominated "sack," which came down to about his knees ; his boots were strong, well made, and his hat no Paris silk, but of soft cloth, such as are those called "Kossuth."

A look at his face, as he passes beneath one of the gas-lamps which line the Mall, reveals a handsome, intelligent countenance, destitute as yet of beard or moustache. About the middle height, he is broad-chested and broad-shouldered, but not dispropor-

tionately so ; he carries his head erect and slightly thrown back—his face slightly turned upwards as he walks, as though sniffing the air and looking up to the sky, rather than down on the earth.

We have said that the face is handsome. The features are well and clearly cut—the nose thin and slightly aquiline, the forehead broad and sufficiently high, the eyebrows arched and very sharply defined, the mouth indicating firmness and decision, the chin slightly prominent, the jaws rather too square, perhaps, for a sculptor's ideal—but, as a whole, the face is one that would challenge attention, and meet with the approval of nine out of ten.

His hair was of a light brown colour, and had a tendency to curl, but being worn tolerably short, enabled the contour of that well-shaped head to be more plainly seen.

As yet we have said nothing of the eyes ; and yet they form the most striking feature in a striking face, give character to the whole, a key as it were to the disposition of the young man.

They are large, of a light-grey colour, bright and clear, fringed with long lashes of a darker hue than the eyebrows, and with scarcely any white visible. An adept could read in those handsome grey eyes a bold, determined, and reckless spirit. Eyes that would quail before those of no man ; eyes that told of a joyous, pleasure-loving, good-humoured disposition ; a love of excitement and a determination to attain any object on which the mind was fixed—be it of profit, ambition, pleasure, or what not, in defiance of all obstacles, physical or moral.

One impression which his whole appearance and manner gave was decidedly favourable ; but there seemed a super-abundance of self-confidence and carelessness of consequences amounting to audacious recklessness, which might lead the young man into imprudence, folly—even sin ; but never deliberate or dishonourable crime. That we might safely predicate from the countenance and bearing of Roland Dane.

With such a character, physically and morally, he would be almost certain to commit many faults, and he might be esteemed fortunate if his reckless pleasure-loving nature, his defiance of consequences, did not lead to something more serious.

When he had got about halfway between Buckingham Palace and that of St. James, a carriage rapidly drove past him and pulled up close to a gas lamp about fifty yards ahead.

As he approached he saw a lady alight and speak to the coachman, who drove slowly away.

It struck him that this was a very strange proceeding. It was not by any means the sort of night for a lady to alight from her carriage, send it away, and take a solitary walk along the broad Mall.

He slackened his pace wondering a good deal, and watched the lady look round her as if expecting to see some one, and then slowly walk on towards the next lamp-post.

Although he too walked slowly, he gained upon her, and when she came within scope of the light of the next lamp, he saw that she was attired in a magnificent suit of Russian fur.

While he was wondering at his strange fancy on the part of a lady, he heard the rumble of wheels and the tramp of horses behind him. Unpractised as were his ears, he thought that this was no hack cab, but another carriage approaching, and presently it passed him.

Just before it reached the lady, the horses were brought to a standstill so suddenly as almost to bring them on their haunches. Instantly the door was thrown open and two men leaped out. The lady faced about sharply, and then as the men came towards her, gave a faint cry, and again turning tried to escape.

But the taller of the two men dashed on in pursuit, and after a race of only a few yards, he caught her.

The other coming up, the two of them commenced dragging her back to the carriage.

Then she shrieked aloud.

“Help! help! help!”

“Curse you! hold your tongue!” he heard one of the men say—for he was now within ten yards of them; and with the words, Roland Dane saw him place his hand on her mouth or throat, he could not tell which.

Another cry, this time faint and muffled, rang out on the night air; and instantly he acted on the impulse of a kind, generous nature.

In two seconds he was in the midst of them; and hurling the shorter of the two men on one side, causing him to stagger and fall, he grappled with the other, seizing him by the throat with the instinct of

a bulldog, and holding him with the tenacity of the same animal.

“Let go the lady! let go!” he cried, “or I’ll shake the life out of you.”

The man—whom he now saw to be fashionably attired in evening dress, diamond studs glittering in is shirt-front—was at first taken unawares. He still held tightly on to the lady, however; whom he grasped with one hand by the shoulder. He was, however, a much taller and heavier man than his assailant, and struggled desperately to release himself from young Dane’s grip.

“Here, Algernon, quick! come to me! Hit the fellow over the head—he’s throttling me!”

And with the words, he struggled even more desperately to shake our friend off.

Struggled without effect, however; for Roland still held him in the same firm grip with one hand, and with the other sought to loosen his hold on the lady’s shoulder. In this he could not succeed; and relinquishing the attempt, gave all his strength and both hands to the task of forcing his antagonist to succumb, by administering severe punishment with his fist.

Still holding him by the throat with the right hand, he struck him again and again in the face with the left; and felt that he staggered under the blows which he vainly attempted to ward off.

The victory must have been to Roland Dane beyond all questions, for the other, still obstinately holding on to the lady, could offer no effective resistance with only one hand; but at this moment his

companion came to his aid, and that in a manner most effective, though cowardly.

With a silver-and-ivory mounted but stout stick, he struck Roland a blow on the head from behind, knocking his hat off.

“ Ah! cowards ! ” shouted the latter ; “ two to one—but I’ll beat you ! ”

And thereupon he struck the man he held by the throat a tremendous blow full between the eyes, which, but for his being so held, must have knocked him backwards.

Now, however, on the bare head of Roland Dane the stick descended again and again, each time making a cut or bruise. Blood streamed down his face, quickly following this onslaught from behind.

Rage and pain nerved him to redoubled exertions, and springing like a tiger from the ground, he leaped full on his adversary, and bore him down with him, forcing him to relinquish his hold on the lady ; they were now more equally matched, for Roland’s man was strong, and fought desperately.

The other now seized the lady, and her shrieks caused Roland to loose his hold on his opponent, who instantly staggered to his feet, our friend following his example almost at the same moment.

Again they grappled, and again they fell ; and the unequal contest could not have been long maintained, for the shorter of the two men struck Dane again and again as the two combatants struggled on the ground, still holding the lady with one hand. She seemed indeed so utterly unnerved by terror as to be incapable of escaping, even if she had the opportunity,

By a desperate effort the young man staggered to his knees, and endeavoured to shake himself clear of his adversary, in order to attack the man with the stick.

Just as he had succeeded in getting free from the other and rose to his feet, he received another blow on the head, and at the same moment heard the voice of a third person—

“Eh! what! two o’ ye to a single man, and one wi’ a stick! That ain’t Lankey fashion, and here’s at ye.”

Scarcely were the words spoken, than down went the hero of the stick, from a blow delivered possibly by a weaker arm, but well directed, and with a heavier stick.

Roland Dane’s welcome aid did not stop at this; but as the taller man rose to his feet he hit him full over the head a clipping blow, saying quietly,—

“Lie there, man, or I’ll do’t again.”

And he lay there.

The victory now lay with Roland Dane and him who had so opportunely come to the rescue. Wiping the blood from his face, he turned his attention to the lady, who stood in a state of nervous excitement, unable to fly, or, indeed, do anything for herself.

“Madam,” said Roland, when he had recovered his breath and his coolness, “I hope you have suffered no harm. Thanks to the assistance of this young man, we have disposed pretty well of these villians.”

“Ah! would you! he cried, snatching the stick from his new ally. “I’ll break your neck for you.”

The lady seemed to arouse from her lethargy all at once.

“No, no,” she cried faintly, seizing his arm. “He is—he is—

She stooped ; and Roland again wiping the blood away which streamed from more than one wound over his face, offered his arm.

“Come lady,” he said, coolly, “for the present we have disposed of those two fellows. Allow me to escort you where you wish to go.”

“Yes, yes,” she cried, “take me away—take me away.”

“My friend,” said Roland quietly to him who had so opportunely come to his assistance, “be good enough to take care of those two vagabonds—see that they do not molest this lady while I escort her.”

Then turning to the lady he said, “Madam, lend me your handkerchief if you have one. Mine I have dropped, and the blood from a little cut I got in the row is running over my face.”

“Ah, poor boy,” she cried, looking at him by the light of a gas lamp, “I fear you are hurt, and for me.”

“Poor boy,” he retorted, with angry emphasis on the word. “I had an idea—a foolish one, perhaps—that I played the part of *man*, a short time back, and not amiss.”

“Pardon, pardon ; I meant no offence. You are so young, I can see,” she stammered ; “but here is my carriage.”

“So young,” he said ; and then, with a laugh, added, as he looked down in her face under the lamp, “and you,—you—are you then so old?”

He was quite cool and at his ease now, having received no serious injury, and the lady felt confused as he looked her full in the face. A very beautiful, girlish, aristocratic face it was; one not often to be equalled in soft loveliness.

Meanwhile, the fifth party in this singular scene—he who had so opportunely intervened in favour of Roland Dane—walked in the rear a few yards, so as to be on guard against any fresh attempt on behalf of the defeated men.

In a short time the carriage was seen approaching at a walking pace.

“Do not let my coachman know there has been any disturbance,” the lady cried, hastily. “Conceal your face if you can.”

“Certainly,” he said, “I will do as the bravos and brigands do in the plays, slouch my hat over my eyes and look mysterious.”

Even in the state of agitation in which she was, she could not help feeling surprised at the light mocking way in which he spoke, after what was, to say the least of it, a very severe encounter.

Further speculation on her part, however, was cut short by the arrival of the carriage opposite them.

Roland Dane politely opened the door, and the lady, with a sigh of relief, entered and leaned back for a moment or two.

“Where to, my lady?” the coachman asked, leaning over from the box.

“St. James’s Palace;—but, stay one moment. You are sure you are in no danger, you and your friend.”

“Danger!” replied Roland, scornfully “I wish there was some; I like it.”

She looked hard at him, as though seeking to discover whether or no he was mocking her.

He too looked at her, and beheld as fair and lovely a young face as man’s eye could wish to rest on—a fairy face of exquisite beauty, the innocence of childhood mingled with the sweet gravity of the woman.

She might be eighteen, certainly not more, this delicate lovely creature whom he had rescued; and as he gazed he thought how he could love her.

Audacious thought! for had not the coachman called her “my lady”?

They remained looking at each other for some quarter minute—he each moment more impressed with her exquisite loveliness; she, as she gazed on his pale face, pale from excitement, feeling strangely interested in his handsome, free and easy, cool and as she thought, somewhat audacious champion. As to which latter adjective she soon had example. Leaning forth from the carriage window, she approached her face near to his, as he stood by the door

“They are gone away—those terrible men.”

“Yes, my lady,” he replied, taking up the coachman’s words, with a tinge of satire in his tone.

“And you—you are in no further danger?”

“No, my lady,” he replied.

“Because if you are you had better jump on the box with the coachman; that is to say,”—she stammered, feeling that she had made a mistake.

“Or,” he said for her, “jump up behind on the

footboard, where your footman should be. My lady, you do me too much honour."

"No, no—a thousand times no!" she cried. "I did not mean that. Come inside with me if you have any fear."

"Fear!" he repeated, this time angrily. "Have I shown any?"

"No, no. You are determined to take offence, it seems. Can I do anything for you—first of all to whom am I indebted? Pray give me your card."

"I haven't one; but here is an envelope with my name and address."

"Thanks, thanks; I will at another time endeavour to show I am not ungrateful for the great service you have rendered me. Ah! if you knew *what* a service!" she cried, clasping her hands, and looking upwards.

"Glad to hear I have been of such great service my lady," he said, quietly.

"Is there anything I can do for you now—anything whatever?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Give me something."

"Name it."

"I will take it—a kiss."

Her fair face was near enough to his for him to carry out his audacious words before she could draw back, as he kissed her fairly on the lips.

She flushed crimson, and cried angrily—

"Insolent! how dare you?"

He saw anger flash from her eyes, and the next instant she pulled up the carriage window with a

violent slam ; then she put her head out at the opposite window, and he heard her cry to the coachman, "St. James's Palace. Drive fast."

As the carriage drove off he heard a voice at his elbow, and turning, saw beside him the young man who had come to his assistance in the nick of time.

"Eh ! but there's a crown on the carriage-door. It would be some great lady—may be the queen herself."

Roland smiled at the absurdity of the idea, but noticed, as the vehicle was driven off, that there was indeed a coronet on the panel.

"The carriage of some nobleman," he said to himself, "beyond all doubt. I wonder who and what she can be—this mysterious young lady, who drives at midnight to the Park, alights amidst the rain, and is forthwith seized by two men. Who is she ? and what is the meaning of this adventure ? "

A question easy to ask, but at present, so far as he was concerned, impossible to answer.

CHAPTER II.

JACOB KNOX. RUSSIAN BULLETS AND A BRAVE
HEART.

“Are you hurt at all?” said Roland, turning, and for the first time, looking attentively at his companion.

“No, sir, I thank you,” was the reply. “I’m afraid though, you are; there is blood on your face.”

“It is nothing, only a cut or two. Have those fellows gone?”

“I see nothing of them,” replied the other. “I think they had enough.”

The young fellow spoke with a slight provincial accent, and Roland knew at once that he was not a Londoner.

In frame he was about the middle height, somewhat slender, very thin, even to gauntness. The pallor of his face, and the prominence of the cheek bones, and the dark sunken eye, seemed to tell a tale either of illness or want.

His attire was respectable; but the coat he wore was thin, and not adapted for such a miserable night.

Looking on his attenuated hands, Roland Dane felt some surprise at the vigour of the blow he had dealt with such good effect. It seemed though, that before illness or want had attenuated him the young

fellow had possessed a powerful body; even now, there was the framework of bones, wanting only muscle and sinew to make him a strong lad.

He could read, too, in the quiet pale face and sunken dark eye, a stout spirit—a spirit which, despite the enfeebled body, caused him to come to the rescue of one who had double odds against him.

Roland felt an interest in his new acquaintance and resolved to know more about him.

“Come,” he said, gaily, “we have fought together, let us sup together—brothers in arms, brothers at the table.”

The other smiled faintly.

“As you like,” he said; “but first I would advise you if possible, to go to a doctor, and have the wound in your head strapped up. Blood is still trickling down your face.”

“Well, yes, I may as well, as you say; not that I feel the hurt much, but it looks so ugly to see a fellow in the street with a crimson stream on his face. Suppose we walk on to Charing Cross Hospital; it will save the trouble and bother of knocking up a doctor, you know. I can have my head strapped up by the house surgeon—put a sovereign in the donation box, and this affair is settled—a matter of ten minutes.”

“I think that will be a good plan,” the pale, wan lad said gravely. “Do you know the way to Charing Cross Hospital? I don’t.”

“Oh, yes, I know the way; I’ve been in London more than a month now.”

“And I three days,” said the other, with a sigh.

"Business or pleasure?" asked Roland, who took an unaccountable interest in his new acquaintance.

"Neither," was the reply. "My health."

"Come to London for health? I've heard of people going to the seaside and watering-places for the benefit of their health, but never of any one coming to London."

"Ah! you do not understand. I have come for medical advice, for which I am too poor to pay. Eminent advice, so that I may regain my strength and health. I came to see the physicians of the consumption Hospital at Brompton."

"Are you then consumptive?" asked Roland, in pitying tones.

"No; they say I am not at present. They tell me I shall regain my health entirely if I rest altogether; and especially they advise me to seek a change of climate. A sea voyage they say would certainly cure me. There is no organic disease, but the injury done by the bullet can only be repaired by time and rest, and the recovery would be greatly aided by change of air and climate."

"You have, then, been wounded?" said Roland.

"I was shot in four places in the Crimean war," replied the lad simply.

Instantly the unknown lad rose fifty-fold in the estimation of Roland Dane, and he wished to learn more about him. He knew not why or wherefore, but he felt a strange interest in this pale, quiet lad, in bad health, and felt inwardly sure that at heart he was sterling metal.

Arrived at ~~Charino~~ Cross Hospital, his head was

soon dressed. In reply to a question from the surgeon as to how he received the bruises and cut, he replied vaguely "accident," not feeling disposed to go into the history of the affair.

As they descended the steps of the hospital, Roland noticed a crimson froth on the lips of his companion.

"Why, you got hurt, too! I suppose your mouth was cut—there is blood on your lips."

"Ah! I wish it was so," the young fellow replied.

"The blood you see comes from the lung, the yet unhealed bullet wound.

Roland said no more, but, taking his companion's arm, he entered a late supper-house, and taking possession of one of the many boxes, ordered for two.

The repast over, he called for two glasses of hot grog, and then asked his companion about himself—his history, prospects, and intentions.

"My name," said the youth, is Jacob Knox. I am twenty years of age; and get my living by working in a cotton-factory near Manchester, my native town.

I always had a taste for adventure, and hated the monotonous, sedentary toil of the mill to which I was brought up: so having some little ear for music, and being able to play the fife, I fell in with a recruiting sergeant who enlisted me as a drummer-boy.

"Even this life—dull enough in time of peace—I thought infinitely preferable to the dreary routine of the cotton mill.

"I had not long worn the scarlet and beaten the drum before the Russian war broke out, and the regiment to which I belonged was ordered to the Crimea.

"We had hardships and dangers enough there to

endure, God knows ; but still I bore up, and might have been well and hearty now, but for receiving these bullet wounds. As you see, they were not fatal but might as well have been so ; for in place of growing to be a strong man, I lingered on, and am now a poor invalid, with little prospect of ever again enjoying health, for, alas ! I am not rich."

" What has wealth to do with it ?" asked Roland, " riches cannot purchase health."

The lad looked at him curiously with his large melancholy eyes.

" You are wrong, sir ; in my case wealth could purchase health. One of the bullets which struck my unlucky body penetrated the right lung, lacerating it and lodging in the back. The lung has not healed, will not heal, I am told by the physicians, unless I can rest entirely, live generously, and, above all, have change of climate. All these to me are impossible while, were I rich, all these would be easy: so, you see, wealth has all to do with it."

Roland Dane said nothing, but remained for some moments buried in thought.

The purport of his cogitation was to this effect—"I should like to assist this poor lad. He is as proud as poor, I feel certain, and would not accept charity. How can I assist him?"

Then he said aloud—"And what of your life since you returned from the Crimea?"

" It is soon told, sir," he said. " I was when wounded sent to the hospital, and tended with the utmost care. My recovery was slow, and never complete. The bullet which lodged in my body was a cause of

constant irritation and pain, preventing me ever regaining strength. When able to crawl about I was discharged, and sent to England with a small—a very small—pension, barely sufficient to pay my rent. The officers and some friends wished to get a subscription for me, and I am told that had I consented I should have realised a very handsome sum. So on my return to my native town I took a small lodging, got work at a mill, and have since toiled on, earning a livelihood, but little more. In spite of all my endeavours and economy, I have during three years of toil been able to save but very little ; for at times I was unable to work for days together. I had long been advised to come to London to consult a celebrated physician, to whom I had an introduction. I had saved up in three years about eight pounds, and last week I came. The physician was very kind; carefully examined me, gave his opinion, and then sent me with a letter to the Brompton hospital.

“The opinion of the physicians there coincided with his. They said that there was no disease of the lungs, but that the laceration caused by the bullet was still unhealed, and probably would remain so until I could have perfect rest, and, above all, change of climate. I might live on for years, they said, but should never gain strength, never enjoy robust health, until the injury to the lung was repaired.

“Such, then, sir, is my prospect.

“To-morrow I return to Lancashire, resume ~~the~~ weary round of labour at the mill, toil on without hope, until death, like a kind friend, shall come to relieve me of my suffering.”

A tear stood in the eye of Roland Dane as the poor Lancashire lad finished his recital.

"My poor fellow," he said, "I feel for you. I wish I could do anything for you."

"You are very kind, sir," replied Jacob Knox, "and I assure you I feel it. It is not often I hear words of sympathy. In the mill they laugh at me, and call me Jacob Long Ghost; and indeed I think they are right, for I know I look very ghostlike and dismal."

"Nonsense! You are a little pale, that is all; and thin, of course, but you'll come round. By the way, you have not told me the circumstances under which you were wounded in the Crimea."

"No, Sir. I don't like boasting, or blowing my own trumpet, as the saying is; but if you wish it, I will tell you all about it."

"Indeed, I do wish it," cried Roland. "We will have one more glass of grog apiece, and then you shall tell me all about it."

The grog was brought, and then Jacob commenced the relation of how it came about he was wounded.

As he went on, and warmed to the subject, a hectic flush came on his pale cheeks, and his dark sunken eyes gleamed at the memories of the past.

Roland Dane was sitting opposite to him; and as he listened to the modest recital of the Lancashire lad's heroism, his eyes shone, and his face beamed with excitement. He had his hat on, and when Jacob Knox finished, he rose, took it off, and grasping the young fellow's hand, said enthusiastically:—

"Sir, Jacob Knox—I take off my hat to you. You

are one of Nature's gentlemen ; and it is a shame and a disgrace to a great country that you should be as you are."

"I only did my duty," said Jacob, quietly.

"Duty be d——d ! It was a noble act of heroism, and many a man has received a peerage for less."

"Well, well, sir, we won't talk about it; but if you don't mind, you will tell me something about yourself. A word or two you have let drop has excited my curiosity, which I hope you'll pardon."

"My history is a less eventful one than yours—unmarked by any such stirring scenes or noble deeds.

"My name is Roland Dane. I am an orphan, like yourself, and have no relation living except an uncle whom I don't like—to put it mildly—and who I know hates me. He is an attorney in a country town in Gloucestershire, has money, is greedy for more, caring little by what means attained. By my father's will, I inherit property on attaining the age of twenty five, and my uncle, John Dane, attorney-at-law, is my guardian. He wished me to take the law as my profession—insisted on it, in fact—I believe solely because he knew I hated it. The property I shall come into on attaining the age of five-and-twenty is small, and he has the power to delay, if not prevent, my ever coming into possession. Small as it is, he would like to have it—covets it, indeed—though only a little grass farm, worth perhaps six thousand pounds.

"I have always longed, with an ardent thirst, for a life of adventure, to see life and the world, to travel, to hunt wild animals. Until lately, these ideas of

mine assumed no definite shape; but it happened by chance that I came across a singular opportunity.

“Money was all I wanted to embrace it, so I took the bull by the horns, and boldly went to my uncle.

“Sir,’ I said, ‘you are tired of me, and, to tell the truth I am tired of you. I purpose to go abroad, to shift for myself, and never trouble you more. All I want is money, and I have come to you to arrange about that.

“He looked up from the law documents on which he was engaged, and said, in his hard, harsh way:

“Money—money—indeed; and so, young man, you expect me to give you money.’

“No, I don’t expect you to give money, but to lend it.’

“Indeed—to lend you money; and how do you propose to repay me?’ he asked, with a sneer.

“From the property I shall inherit when I am twenty-five.’

“How much do you want?’

“A thousand pounds down, now; within a few days, that at all events.’

“A thousand pounds! More than you will earn all through your useless life.’

“That may be or may not be,’ I said, nettled at his sneering manner. ‘At all events, what I do earn will be honestly, not by chicanery and fraud.’ For you must know, though I speak of my own near relation, that there are ugly rumours afloat concerning certain ‘sharp practices’ on his part.

“Come back in an hour and I’ll give you an answer,’ he said. ‘And now, go to the devil.’

“‘Thank you,’ I said, burning with indignation. ‘I’ll be back in an hour.

“I went back and he put a proposition before me. It was as follows: I was to assign to him absolutely my entire interest in the little property left me by my father; not mortgage it, you understand, but assign it to him. In return for this he would give me £1,500, and £500 more on my attaining the age of twenty-five. What he proposed was briefly this. To give him property (which I could not touch, however, for four years) worth more than £6,000, for £1,500, down and the promise of £500 more. He would thus make £4,000 by the transaction—an enormous profit.

“Hard terms these for a near relation and guardian to make. But I accepted them, signed the deeds two days afterwards, and received £1,500 in bank notes, and a note of hand for £500 on my attaining the age of twenty-five. I was not long in packing up and starting off, and the next day I arrived in London and at once set about prosecuting my designs. Behold the result: I have been a month in London, have enjoyed myself, have seen something of life; have had an adventure to-night in which a strange, mysterious lady is mixed up; and, moreover, I have made arrangements for a cruise about the world in search of other adventures, not forgetting wealth always desirable, and have no reason to regret having sold my birthright and taken £1,500.”

“And this enterprise, this cruise of which you speak, you have not told me its nature?” said Jacob.

“Ah! my dear, boy. You shall see for yourself.”

Then, taking some papers from his pocket he handed them across the table, saying :—

“Read this—first of all the printed advertisement. Although we have not yet balloted and formally enrolled ourselves, I consider myself one of the **TWENTY CAPTAINS.**”

“The Twenty Captains!” exclaimed Jacob, bewildered.

“Yes, twenty captains, each with equal authority. Twenty sworn companions and brothers-in-arms, sports, and all enterprises. Twenty jolly fellows, Twenty wild rovers in search of fortune and adventure. In short, as we ourselves choose to put it, twenty captains.”

Jacob Knox read the papers placed in his hands with interest, even avidity, asking questions now and again, which the other willingly answered. Especially did the advertisement attract his attention. He read it again and again, and each time sighed deeply. When he had finished all, he leaned his forehead on his hands and seemed to be deep in sad thought.

“Cheer up, my boy,” cried Roland, slapping him heartily on the shoulder. “What’s the matter? I thought this strange project would amuse you; that you would feel an interest, at least, in what, no doubt you and all sober people consider the mad freak of the twenty captains.”

Jacob Knox looked up; his face paler than ever.

“Mr. Dane,” he said, “you have almost made me do what I never did before. I——”

“At least those papers, unfolding so grand, so splendid a scene, have done so.”

“And what is that?”

“You have made me regret that I did not allow them to get up a subscription for me. They say I should have obtained far more than five hundred pounds. Was I right so to refuse? In my pride, I said, though I will not take charity, if what I have done and what I have suffered does not bring me more substantial reward than medal or ribbon, I will work or starve.”

“Did you ever make application to Government, stating your claims to such reward?”

“Never! may my hand wither, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, sir, ere I beg of man, or any Government. They gave me my pay and my pension, what right have I to ask more? Have I not four shillings and sixpence a week for life? Ought I not to be contented and happy ever?”

The young fellow spoke with a bitterness not to be expressed on paper.

Roland exclaimed, “Five hundred pounds! I gather from your mentioning that sum that you would like to make one of this expedition—to be one of the twenty captains.”

“Like to make one!” Sir, I tell you no falsehood when I say I would give ten years of my life—ay, half of what remains to me,—I would give that, for that is all I have to give.”

He sank his voice to a low key at the last words, and the tones fell so sadly and mournfully on Roland’s ears, as to impress him strongly.

“You wish to go with us—to be one of us?”

“Wish—ah!—but it is no use talking.”

“But it is use talking. By Jove! old fellow, you behaved like a brick to-night. I’ll see what can be done—see if I can’t manage it for you.”

The dark eyes of Jacob Knox gleamed with a wild hope, and his pale cheek flushed at the words.

“Ah! if indeed it were possible! if it were but possible!” he said, and then lapsed into silence, and sighed.

“I’ll see, I’ll see,” cried Roland, excitedly, “for if it can be done it shall be done. Come along, now; I’ll meet you to-morrow. Here, waiter, the bill.”

The bill was brought, and Roland Dane, who had been fumbling for something in his pocket, was unable to find any money.

“Singular,” he said. “I had a hundred-pound note and a five-pound note in an envelope. I brought the large note intending to get it changed, but forgot it. My last sovereign I put in the donation box of the hospital.”

Roland said this quite innocently, without the slightest embarrassment, as he knew he had only to send to the hotel where he was staying to procure any money he might require.

However, the waiter, standing with bill in hand looked suspicious.

Roland did not notice it, but Jacob Knox did.

“I have some gold,” he said, quietly, producing a little leather bag, containing, poor lad, all that remained of the savings of years. “How much will you have?”

“Thank you,” replied his companion, “a sovereign will do.”

Jacob gave him the sovereign, and he paid the bill. Then, taking the arm of the other, as though they were old chums, both strolled out of the place together.

“I can’t understand about that money,” Roland said. “I’m quite certain I put a hundred-pound note and a five-pound note in an envelope this morning, and placed it in the breast pocket of my coat.”

“You are sure?” asked Jacob.

“Quite sure.”

“Then I think I can explain it to you. You remember when the lady who was concerned in our adventure to-night asked you for a card, you said you had not one, but gave her an envelope instead. Probably the notes were in that envelope.”

“Probably! Now I think of it, I am sure they must have been. What a nuisance!” he continued; “but, of course, I shall never see them again.”

“Your address was on the envelope.”

“Yes; but I offended her by kissing her the last thing, and she’ll burn them, or give them to her maid, or anything rather than return them to me. By Jove! how furious she looked!”

“Pardon me, sir. You are wrong. I believe she will return you the notes.”

“Why? I tell you I offended her.”

“I know you did, and was sorry to see it. That is the very reason she will return them. You did her good service; and again I say—pardon me!—acted very badly in doing as you did. I hope you are not offended?”

“No, go on.”

“ Well, Mr. Dane, I am only a poor lad—you a gentleman; but it seems to me very wrong—unmanly even—to presume on a service rendered, to venture on a liberty—an insult, some might call it,—which otherwise you would not have done. I speak plainly. I always do. I cannot help it.”

The hot blood mounted to the face of Roland Dane, and for a moment or two he felt angry, and inclined to resent the words of Jacob; but his better nature prevailed. Something within him whispered that the lad was right, he wrong.

He stopped.

“ Jacob Knox,” he said, “ I was wrong, you right I am a gentleman born and bred; but you are a better gentleman at heart than I. You are one of nature’s noblemen. Give me your hand. I stand rebuked before you.”

Then they parted, after making an appointment to meet again on the morrow.

Said Roland Dane to himself, as he walked slowly home:—

“ So he thinks I shall see her mysterious ladyship again. I hope so. I wish I had not kissed her, though. It was rude and ungentlemanly, to say the least.”

Thus cogitating, Roland Dane reached his hotel, and entered, where for the present we will leave him.

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER OF THE TWENTY. THE
BALLOT-BOX. A STARTLING SURPRISE.

A HANDSOMELY furnished, well lighted room, with a score or more persons seated on either side of a long table running along the whole length. At the end opposite the door is a raised chair—in fact, a sort of throne.

On one side of this chair (occupied evidently by the President of the assembly) is a small table on which is a ballot-box.

Beside this, a man is standing. On the left hand of the chairman there hangs suspended to the wall a large slate, and beside this, with a lump of chalk in hand, stands a gigantic specimen of humanity, fully six feet four in height, and with shoulders, limbs, and body in proportion. Behind, and above the head of the President, is a printed placard, a copy of an advertisement which some time back appeared in several London daily, weekly, and sporting papers.

The President rises and addresses the company,

“Gentlemen, we are here to-night, as you know, for each man to propose himself as a member of the intended expedition, to state his qualifications and reasons for embarking in the enterprise—to ballot

ourselves in, or be blackballed out, as the case may be. Such among us as claim a reduction of the amount, by reason of any special qualification, will state it, and the majority will decide whether it shall be altered or not; then, when the ballot has taken place, such of us as are duly elected will proceed to elect a treasurer, in whose hands each member will deposit five hundred pounds, or such smaller sum as may be allowed by the majority. I, as the President, will state my qualifications, and be balloted for first, as it is necessary that there should be some one to keep order, and decide disputed points. Afterwards each gentleman's name will be drawn by chance from a hat, and then the one so drawn will rise, state his qualifications and reasons, and be balloted for. Gentlemen, to business. Silence."

Three tremendous raps on the desk before him followed this speech.

Silence, however, was not obtained all at once, and while this is being done we will give for the reader's benefit the advertisement before spoken of, which had appeared in several papers, and which had been the means of drawing the present assemblage together.

Thus it ran:—

"To gentlemen fond of sport, life, excitement, and adventure. A few gentlemen propose to organise an expedition, sporting, nautical, exploring, trading and adventurous.

"To carry out this idea, it will be necessary to purchase or charter a vessel, equip her and provide

stores and a crew. Also, for trading purposes and to cover expenses, to have a sum of money in hand. The expedition will be limited to twenty gentlemen, each of whom, it is proposed, contribute £500 to the general fund, making £10,000 in all—a very handsome capital. Several gentlemen are already prepared to do so. It is further proposed that a commutation of the sum be accepted from such as have special qualifications, and whose services may be more valuable than their money. This may reduce the capital, but it is confidently expected that the deficiency may be made up by private subscriptions among the other associates.

“The object and destination of the expedition will depend upon the will of the members, expressed by vote, after a meeting and discussion. The disposal of the money will also be strictly regulated by vote of the members, a treasurer and committee being appointed in the same way.

“A vast field of enterprise, adventure, and profit lies open to the members of the expedition; guided by circumstances, they may cruise about the world in their clipper ship, explore distant lands and seas, find sport in hunting and shooting big game—elephants, lions, buffaloes, and the like, taking the ivory, and skins, which will prove a large source of profit; or they may go on a trading voyage to the Gold Coast, for gold, oil, and ivory, or to the South Sea Islands for coral *bêche-la-mer* and pearls; or, again, they may sail from port to port, taking merchandise as freight, or, if so disposed, may themselves purchase a cargo and load the vessel; in fact

there are many courses open, any of which to be chosen by the vote of the majority of the twenty.

“Four gentlemen have already put their names down, and are willing to subscribe their share—£500. None but such as are considered eligible to the majority will be permitted to join the expedition, as harmony and good fellowship are indispensable for the success of the undertaking, both in a pecuniary sense and a matter of pleasure. Money alone will not be a sufficient passport. Gentlemen intending to join will therefore be required to spend a month in London in the constant society of those who are going on the expedition, dining together every day.—For further particulars apply to Captain O'Rourke, Adelphi Chambers, Adelphi, London; and Ballysmashem Castle, County Clare, Ireland, who will give every information and assistance.”

So ran the printed placard, in type large enough to be read the whole length of the room. It was only displayed when business was going on, and the President who sat beneath was Captain O'Rourke himself. Silence having been obtained, the President rose, and with a slight Irish brogue addressed the company.

“Gentlemen, I wish to be one of this expedition. I have organised it; I am an Irishman; the proprietor of Ballysmashem Castle; my heart's in the right place, though it's myself that says it. As for my rayson for wanting to go along with the lot of ye it's because I know ye're all a lot of jolly dogs together. And I've got five hundred pounds ready.

And that's all I've got to say, so ballot for Captain O'Rourke, your President *pro tem.*, as soon as you like."

This speech was greeted with cheers and shouts of "The ballot! the ballot!" Then each man rose by turns, beginning from the President's right hand and, advancing to the little table, was given by the attendant two small ivory balls—a black one and a white one. If he favoured the admission of the candidate he placed the white ball in the receptacle; if not, the black one, disposing of the remaining ball in another partition.

All having balloted, examination was made, and it was found that Captain O'Rourke was unanimously elected, at which there was great applause and cheering.

Next a hat was brought, and the President placed therein a number of pieces of paper, previously prepared, each having a name written thereon.

The President drew out one little roll, and read out the name, "Thomas Steele."

Up rose a fresh-complexioned, burly young fellow apparently from twenty-five to thirty years of age."

"Thomas Steele," said the President, "you are required to give your reasons and qualifications for wishing to join this honourable company on the intended expedition."

"Mr. President and gentlemen," said the person addressed, "my name's Tom Steele, of Barnet, Berks, farmer; I want to be in this affair to see sport. I've hunted foxes, and hares, and rabbits, shot partridges, pheasants, woodcocks, and snipes; but I'm not

satisfied with that—I want a fly at nobler quarry—lions, tigers, buffaloes, and elephants, as it says in the paper behind the President. I want to have a slap at that sort of game. These are my reasons and I hope you are all satisfied.”

Thomas Steele sat down, but had to rise again.

“Mr. Thomas Steele,” said Captain O’Rourke, “I consider your reasons satisfactory, but we have not yet heard your qualifications.”

“Qualifications, eh?” said Tom Steele, of Barnet, again rising. “Well, let’s see; I’m twenty-eight years old, a single man, and weigh seventeen stone. I’ve got a thousand pounds in my pocket, and they do say, in our part of the world, I’ve the fastest horse, the ugliest dog, and the handsomest sister of any man in Berkshire; and I mean to take the dog with me. There, I hope that’s qualification enough, Mr. President.”

A roar of laughter followed this, and when it subsided somebody shouted out:

“Can’t you take the pretty sister instead of the ugly dog with you, Tom Steele?”

At which sally there was another burst of merriment.

Tom Steele was balloted for, and admitted without a black ball.

The next name down was that of Roland Dane, who sat at the end of the table, near the door, with Jacob Knox on his left hand. The latter, though pale, looked excited and anxious.

Rowland Dane arose, and commenced:

“Mr. President——”

He stooped, feeling Jacob touch his arm.

“Don’t interrupt me, there’s a good fellow,” he said, hurriedly; and again commenced :

“Mr President and——”

But this time his sleeve was plucked harder than before, and he heard Jacob Knox say :

“Look—look by the door! there is the lady; I said she would come.”

And looking round, Roland Dane beheld the mysterious lady of the Park adventure standing by the door—which had closed behind her—evidently in a great state of embarrassment.

He saw her now by the bright light of the chandelier, and thought he had never beheld a more lovely object. She was in travelling dress—wrapped in costly furs, so that he could only make out of her figure that she was about the middle stature and slight. But the face—such a face!

It seemed like sunshine in a shady place;—pale, but so sweetly beautiful, she stood by the door like a startled fawn.

No one had seen her enter. No one knew how she had come where she was.

There was a dead silence, amidst which Roland Dane advanced towards her and respectfully bowed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADY MAUDE. A MYSTERY.

ROLAND DANE, as he advanced towards the mysterious lady whose sudden appearance standing at the door had produced such astonishment among those assembled, felt greatly embarrassed.

As for her, she stood pale, frightened, almost trembling, as might a wood-nymph on unexpectedly finding herself before a group of fauns and satyrs.

It was obvious that she had entered the room by mistake, but the faculties of Roland Dane were in too bewildered a state for him to see this. He felt, he knew that the eyes of all present were upon him and this mysterious lady. The dead silence which prevailed was to him oppressive; and it was with difficulty that he was able so far to collect himself as to make a polite bow to the lady, who still stood in a state of frightened embarrassment. She was unable to escape, for the door had closed behind her by a spring, and had fastened itself with a catch which she did not understand.

She was the first to speak, and her silvery voice, tremulous with emotion, recalled him to himself.

“I have made a mistake, sir. If you are the gentleman who assisted me the other night in the

park, I have something of yours which you gave me by mistake. I inquired for you, and then asked if there was a ladies' coffee-room where I could write a note. They directed me in the hall, but I must have taken the wrong staircase."

Such was, indeed, the fact; on ascending to the first-floor the lady had been directed to the first small staircase on the left, which would lead direct to the ladies' drawing-room. In place thereof, she had taken that to the right, and, opening a door before her, found herself suddenly in the council chamber of the twenty.

"Permit me to conduct you to the ladies' coffee-room, madam," said Roland; and releasing the catch of the door, he opened it, and deferentially held it aside while she passed out. She paused on the landing, which he read as a permission for him to escort her.

"This way, madam," he said, and moved on.

She bowed slightly, and followed, nor spoke until they stood together in the room of the hotel, set apart for ladies only and their friends.

It was not a private room, but free to all lady visitors. At the present moment, however, it was untenanted, so they could speak without embarrassment from listeners.

She was the first to break the silence.

"Are you aware, Mr. Dane," she said, raising her large lustrous blue eyes, and fixing them on his face "that I have some money of yours—notes—which I suppose you did not know were contained in the envelope you gave me."

“Yes; I thought that I had given them to you by mistake,” he said.

“And now, sir, all I have to do is to return them. Thank you again, most sincerely, for the great service you rendered me. I wish you good evening.”

She tried to speak coldly and calmly, but her voice trembled a little, possibly at the memory of the affray and the danger she had been saved from by the young man before her, and Jacob Knox.

As she finished she made a slight curtsey, and moved a little towards the door.

“Madam—my lady!” he cried impetuously, “I trust you will not leave thus.”

“Not leave thus?” she said, interrogatively.

“No; not until I have apologised, and received your pardon, for my unwarranted and ungentlemanly conduct the other evening, just before you drove off in your carriage.”

She flushed crimson, and then turned away her head.

When she looked at him again she was smiling through her blushes.

“A fault confessed and apologised for,” she said, “is half atoned. I am inclined to forgive you.”

“Thanks—thanks! I cannot think what evil demon possessed me so to act.”

“Perhaps, sir, she said, a little harshly, “you formed a mistaken estimate of me.”

“No—no; I mean no thought derogatory to you in the slightest degree ever crossed my mind. I did it on the impulse of the moment. I was excited by the affray—scarcely master of my actions.”

“There, there, that will do,” she said, “I forgive you; in proof whereof I give you my hand.”

He took it, looked in her eyes, saw there neither anger nor scorn, and saying—

“At least this may be permitted,” raised it respectfully to his lips, and kissed the tips of her fingers.

She made no resistance, but coloured a little, and laughed—a sweet musical laugh.

“You are very gallant, young sir. I ought to be angry with you, but cannot, in memory of the great service you rendered me. Ah! if you knew from what you saved me.” She shuddered, and turned pale at the thought.

“Should I be presuming too much in asking the nature of the misfortune or disaster, from which I saved you?”

“No, I do not take it as presumption on your part, but I cannot answer you.”

“Cannot?” he said, interrogatively: for his curiosity in this mysterious lady, so young and so very lovely, was now roused.

“Well, will not, if it pleases you better,” she said again laughing a little.

“At all events, I hope all danger is now passed.

“*Mon Dieu*, no!” she cried. “I shall never be out of danger so long as I remain in this country. I seek safety at once in flight to a foreign land. I shall go to my sister—to St. Petersburgh, probably.”

“And I, too, am going abroad,” he said; “probably we shall never meet again. May I not have at least the satisfaction of knowing the name of the fair lady

to whom, by good fortune, I have been enabled to do some slight service?"

"Yes, I will tell you my name—Maude. Think of me as Maude until we meet again."

"Until we meet again!" he exclaimed; "that may be—probably will be—never."

"Not so," she said, smiling: "we shall meet again some day, when I am free from the terror and trouble which now oppresses me; when my brother——"

She stopped suddenly; and Roland remained attentively listening for her to finish her sentence.

"No, no," she said, passionately stamping her foot on the ground: "I said brother. I hate the word—the very thought!"

He wondered much; and but for the fact that he felt certain there was some mystery, he would have thought her mad.

"I do not wish to pry into your secrets, Lady Maude; by what other name shall I know you?" he asked, artfully, thinking that, perhaps, on the impulse of the moment she would tell him.

"You know me as Lady Maude," she said—a quiet smile on her beautiful face as she spoke. What can it matter by what name you know me for probably we shall not meet again?"

"And am I never to know more concerning this strange adventure, in which I, you, and Jacob Knox bore part, than I do now?"

"I do not say never," she replied, after thinking for a few moments. "At present it is not possible that I should tell you. But why should you wish to know, since it cannot benefit you? I asked if I

could serve you in any way—make you any recompense for your gallant conduct. You said, 'No' How, then, can it interest you to know my name or more about me than you already do?"

Perhaps she did not mean to elicit a complimentary speech; but these words, and the look and conscious blush which accompanied them, had the effect, and he at once replied, enthusiastically—

"What interest can I have in knowing more of you? Who that had once seen your face—heard your voice—could fail to feel a lifelong interest in you; who that has ever been favoured by a look and smile from the loveliest face nature ever gave to woman, but must treasure up the memory for ever?"

He was going on in a rapturous strain; but she stopped him, and with a little laugh, which showed she was not altogether displeased—

"There, there, my dear sir; pray, stop. I assure you I hear compliments enough and to spare. Now, once again, I ask you, can I do anything whatever to show my gratitude.

"Nothing except what I have asked."

"Ah! my portrait. You shall have it without fail. I wish you had asked for something more worthy than a poor picture of myself."

He looked up suddenly, spoke a few words and then as suddenly stopped.

"Ah! if instead of the picture I dared——"

What he would have said was obvious enough, although the sentence was not completed. She knew that the thought in his mind was, "if instead of the picture I dare ask for yourself."

The idea was audacious, so much that he felt it and cut the sentence short.

And she, too, felt it, and coloured up, from a mixture of feelings—a little anger at his impudence, a little confusion, a tinge of amusement, and, perhaps, though she would not own it even to herself, a shade of something certainly not displeasure.

The undisguised admiration of the handsome young dare-devil before her, who had done much to earn her favourable regard, had an influence on her woman's nature; for woman's heart is of the same stuff, whether it beats in the breast of a princess or a peasant girl.

She affected, however, not to notice the unfinished speech, and said, as calmly as she could, and yet not coldly—

“ Well, sir, although at present I am unable to render you any service in return for that which you did for me, the time may come when it may be in my power. I will give you an address, that of an old and faithful friend, to whom you can, if at any time you are in trouble of any sort, apply; and though I should be abroad, where I am now going, or at the other side of the globe, I will use all my influence to do anything a lady can to aid you. I was not too proud to accept your assistance: there is no reason why you should be to accept mine.”

“ But, madam,” he said, “ how can I apply to an unknown person? You refuse me your name.”

“ My name! Ah! how can I give it you? What do you ask? I tell you that I do not even know my name.”

He looked utterly astonished at this, as well he might; and she, noticing the expression of blank amazement on his features, sought to explain away her words.

“That is to say, I am not certain; I cannot tell: but it is impossible for me to make you understand. I cannot, will not say more. I will write you the address. Ask for Lady Maude. Give the good woman a letter or message for Lady Maude, and I shall receive it, and give it immediate attention.”

She spoke rapidly, as though to hide her embarrassment, and taking from her pocket a little memorandum book, wrote a few words, and then tearing out the leaf, handed it to him.

As for Roland Dane, he was utterly bewildered.

“Oh, she must be mad!” he thought to himself. “Not know her own name! If that is not a mystery I don’t know what is.”

Then there flashed across his mind a strange idea as to the meaning of the affair in the park.

Was it not possible that this young and lovely lady was indeed mad, and that the attempt which he and Jacob Knox had frustrated was to remove her to an asylum?

There was a scared look on his face as he took the little piece of paper from her hand, which for a moment puzzled her.

Then her fair face flushed with intelligence, and she laughed a pretty silvery laugh.

“Ah! how stupid you men are! what an absurd idea.”

“Absurd idea!” he faltered.

“Yes, yes; silly fellow that you are; you think me mad. Now, it is you that is the madman, in my opinion. While standing unnoticed inside the room into which I had accidentally intruded, I had time to glance at the printed placard over the head of the gentleman at the head of the table. What a mad idea! What a crew of madmen! Only imagine twenty reckless Don Quixotes as yourself roaming about the world in search of adventure! Oh, what scrapes you will get into! I really cannot help laughing at the thought of the giants you will conquer, the windmills you will charge, lance in rest, and overthrow. If each of you had only a faithful follower, a Sancho Panza, the affair would be complete.”

Roland Dane's cheek burned as he listened to her merciless badinage.

“Yes,” she said, still laughing, “I will give you a name for your mad-brained band. Call yourselves “The Twenty Quixotes.””

“It is not you who should reproach me with engaging in Quixotic adventures,” he said, hotly. “In the only case of which you have knowledge my interference was neither ridiculous nor unavailing.”

She saw instantly that she had vexed him.

“Ah! now you are angry,” she said with a winning smile, “and you should not be, for I did not allude to that night's adventure. Then you played the part of a Bayard—*sans peur et sans reproche*. Come, Mr. Dane, don't be angry with the silly words of a silly girl. Let us not part ill friends.”

The smile, artless look, and outstretched little hand would have melted a much sterner man who had

received graver offence, and Roland felt as though he could have knelt at her feet.

“She is an enchantress—a fair witch—a beautiful mystery, this Lady Maud,” he said to himself, as, blushing like a schoolboy, he bowed over the offered hand, and tried to stammer out a few words of apology.

“There, there, that will do; for now I must say good-bye, and be going.”

“And I shall see you no more, I suppose,” he said, sadly; “but must in my thoughts remember you only as a lovely vision—a mysterious fairy—who has once crossed my path, and vanished for ever into thin air.”

“Perhaps we may meet again under other circumstances; perhaps, in other and happier days, I may be able to explain what now seems to you such an utter mystery, to render my conduct intelligible, and to let you know the nature of the service you have rendered me, for which, believe me, I shall be for ever grateful.”

“You are going abroad, you say. May I not even be permitted to know where?”

“I am not certain. I shall probably go to St. Petersburg, as my sister, the Prince——”

She stopped herself, and colouring slightly, finished by saying, “As my sister, a married lady, is probably there.”

“What was she about to say? what had she almost said?” Roland asked himself. “Was it not ‘my sister the Princess’? Yes, of that he could hardly be mistaken. Her sister the Princess! She then was Lady Maude something, and her sister a princess.

This, however, so far from clearing up the mystery, seemed to render it even more unfathomable.

“I too am going abroad,” he said, after a pause; “who knows—perhaps we may meet?”

“Perhaps so—who can say,” she replied, smiling, and holding forth her hand. “Once again I bid you farewell. You will remember what I have told you—that if ever in trouble or difficulty, you can depend on my assistance to the uttermost in my power. Despise not my words—though now a weak and persecuted girl, I have influence, of the nature of which you can know nothing.”

“Will you not give me some token which I may send to you, if I am in want of your aid, as proof?”

“What a persevering fellow it is!” she said, smilingly; “but you shall have what you ask. See, here is a ring, which I wear on the second finger; it is slightly too large for me, and it may fit your little finger. Take it, and wear it for my sake.”

With the words she gave him a pretty half-hoop ring, set with diamonds and rubies.

“Now I must indeed be gone. For the third time, farewell.”

“But your portrait, Lady Maude—you know you promised me that,” he cried eagerly.

“Oh! this man—this man!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands in mock despair. “What an audacious, persistent, gallant, gay Lothario it is! Well, sir, I will keep my word; you shall have my portrait. I will send it to you.”

“Thanks—thanks! a thousand thanks!” he cried

“At least I will escort you to your carriage, which I suppose is waiting.”

To this she made no objection; and he, opening the door, bowed, and offered his arm.

She took it, half smilingly, half pettishly, and he led her down the stairs, through the hall, out on to the hotel steps.

He himself threw open the carriage-door, and assisted her in.

She leaned from the window, and just as he noticed that there was an armorial device on the panel, placed her cambric handkerchief over it.

Then she looked in his face, smiled a saucy, tantalizing smile and said, sweetly, kindly: “Farewell, Senor Don Quixote. I wish you all success. We may meet again.”

This said, she gave the coachman the brief order, “Where you came from;” leaned back in the elegant little carriage, and with her handkerchief still held over the armorial bearings—a sight of which might have enabled Roland Dane to learn who and what she was—the vehicle rapidly rolled on, leaving him standing bewildered and disconsolate, with the little ring she had given him in his hand.

He stood for some time gazing at the retreating carriage, and listening to the sound of the wheels, till it grew fainter and fainter, and died away. Then he slowly went back into the hotel, and examined the little gemmed ring she had given him.

On the inner side of the circle was the single word, “Maude,” engraved in fine hair-like letters.

“And this,” he said to himself, as he ascended the

stairs, "is all the clue I have to my adventure with the mysterious lady. Maude! Maude! Lady Maude! I may never see you again; but it will be long ere I forget you."

And she, as she was whirled away in her carriage, leaning back, languidly murmured to herself:

"Shall I ever see him again? His very insolence and audacity, which should make me scorn him, cause me to feel a strange interest. I know not who he is—what he is—beyond his name. I do know that he is reckless, presumptive, probably a scapegrace; and yet I cannot all at once forget him."

Roland Dane, his thoughts full of his beautiful and mysterious visitor, returned to the large room where the committee, council—call it what you please—were assembled. A shout greeted his entrance, and he at once perceived that business had been laid aside, and pleasure the order of the day. The President still occupied his post of honour, but on the desk in front of him was a box of cigars and a steaming bowl of punch. The man at the ballot-box was still on his right hand, as was the gigantic specimen of humanity on his left, but both were accommodated with chairs, and on a small table before them were glasses of some hot mixture.

The same was the case all round the table, and there could be no doubt whatever that hilarity had for that evening usurped the place of all more serious proceedings.

"Where's the lady?" cried one, as Roland took his place beside Jacob Knox.

"What have you done with the unknown princess?"

"Yes, where's the mysterious unknown?"

"Answer for yourself, you reprobate," shouted another.

"Hallo!" cried Dick Rollo, known as Dare Devil Dick, "she's given him a ring. Hand it round to the company for approval."

Roland, who unthinkingly held the ring in his hand, turning it over and over in his fingers, hastened to conceal it.

His face flushed at this and much more chaff he received, but after a moment or two he collected his thoughts, and, rising to his feet, addressed the company.

"Mr. President and gentlemen——"

The president interrupted, "Captain President and gentlemen, if you please. None of yer misters for me. I've a double right to the title—first I'm Captain O'Rourke, of Ballysmashem Castle, Ireland, and as I have been duly proposed and elected, I am the first of the Twenty Captains—the first, and President."

This assertion of his rights by the gallant O'Rourke, of Ballysmashem Castle, Ireland, was received with unanimous applause, and Roland, bowing, again took up speech.

"Captain President and gentlemen, for my recent absence I have to apologize. The lady who by accident intruded into this room I have the honour to know. She came on a matter of business, and, intending to go to the ladies' coffee-room and wait for me, took the wrong staircase, and suddenly found herself, to her great dismay, in presence of this

worshipful company, and, the door closing with a spring, was unable to retreat. After this explanation, Captain President and gentlemen, I trust that no one will make use of light words, or use disrespectful language with regard to myself and the lady in question."

This speech was so much to the purpose and so moderate, that it also elicited the approval of the assembly; and next the President arose, and having obtained silence by three raps on the table, spoke:

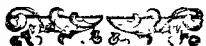
"Gentlemen all, during the absence of Mr. Roland Dane his name was drawn from the hat. Under the circumstances of his unavoidable absence I ordered an adjournment. From certain indications I think it will be as well if this special meeting be adjourned until this day next week. Gentlemen, the council is over. No more business to-night. And now, be japers, we'll give our minds to whisky."

In speaking the last sentence the gallant captain let the brogue appear, which he had endeavoured with tolerable success, to conceal while speaking on business. It was a peculiarity with him that, whenever he was excited or convivial, the broad brogue would always break out.

A prolonged applause, the jingling of glasses, and the speedy emptying of the contents ther eof, sufficiently proved that the President's proposal was generally approved by the brotherhood.

The rest of the evening was devoted to joviality, and more than one of the intending adventurers took more of the strong punch brewed by the gallant O'Rourke than was good for them.

Leaving them to carouse, and enjoy themselves to the top of their bent—jolly companions every one—some of whom, nevertheless, would have aching heads in the morning, we will proceed with the next chapter.



CHAPTER V.

A VILLANOUS SCHEME.

Two well-dressed men are seated together in handsomely furnished chambers in the Albany. These are the two whose acquaintance we first made in the heavy carriage in St. James's Park.

The one is Sir Robert Barclay, Bart., of Farnham Hall, Surrey, and Inveresk, Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

The one of these estates he had inherited from his father; the other came to him by his mother's side.

At the date of which we speak, both had all but slipped from his grasp. A long course of gambling on the turf, and in West-end Hells, had resulted in both of these properties being so heavily mortgaged as to be practically worthless to the dissipated *roué*, who was still their nominal owner; and moreover the ruined baronet was heavily in debt, had all but run to the end of his tether, had several executions out against him, was in danger of arrest, and he who had once enjoyed an income of eight or ten thousand a-year now found it difficult to lay his hands on five hundred, to meet pressing necessities. Nevertheless, Sir Robert, save to those who were in the secret, kept up a bold front. He was still the nominal owner of two country seats, and at his place in Scotland there was excellent grouse shooting, so

that he could always depend on the company of men wealthier than himself so long as he could stave off pressing necessities, keep a good table, and give his guests choice wine.

Right well he knew, however, that this could not last, and cast about him for means to retrieve his ruined fortunes. As to the nature of the transaction by which he could attain that desirable object, he cared not one jot. On investigating his accounts he found that his debts amounted to about a hundred thousand pounds, of which at least seventy thousand were pressing. It was under these circumstances that he ventured on a bold stroke, and anyone capable of reading the human countenance would have said most decidedly that he had failed.

His face was flushed, his eyes bloodshot as though he had been indulging in a debauch to drown care. There was observant, too, a certain restlessness, which betokened a mind ill at ease. He rose every now and then, and paced up and down the room, with lips compressed and clenched hands.

“I tell you, Algernon, it won’t do. Accursed fortune has frustrated us this time. But for those vagabonds who came to her aid, the game was in our hands. If you’d been a man, d—— you, we should have won. I did my share ; you were of no more use than a schoolboy.”

This language to his companion, and the tone in which he spoke, were sufficient to show that he held the latter in profound contempt, and that moreover the other was destitute of all spirit or independence of character.

"It's no good grumbling at me, Barclay," said the other, snappishly. "I was as anxious to succeed as ever you could be. How the devil I shall get on I don't know. Something must be done."

The speaker looked as haggard and dispirited as his companion; but there was wanting that air of bold defiance which characterized the scowling face of Sir Robert Barclay. The features of the younger man betokened cunning and wickedness, but not that of a bold villain.

He was a man whom no crime could appal, but who would hesitate ere he put himself in peril. Sir Robert, on the other hand, was a bold villain; once he had decided a scheme was feasible, he would attempt its execution. The audacious outrage on the lovely lady in the park, which, through the opportune arrival of Roland Dane and Jacob Knox, had resulted in total discomfiture, was at the suggestion of the younger man; but the details of the plot and the attempt at carrying it out were due to Sir Robert, and it was only with much difficulty that the other was induced to accompany him.

And now the younger man—Algernon, as Sir Robert called him—had another plot hatching in his brain. Looking up furtively every now and again at Sir Robert's face, he hesitated to speak, for he wanted nerve—even ordinary courage in every-day affairs—to risk desperate ventures, which might introduce his aristocratic hands to the crank—to oakum-picking, and his feet, encased in French morocco boots, to the steps of the treadmill.

Sir Robert, however, knew and despised his accom-

pliance, and soon saw that he had something on his mind.

“Now, then, Algernon, you’ve got something you’re brooding on, and have not the pluck to say it. What is it? Don’t play the fool, for something must be done.”

“It’s all very well talking like that,” replied Algernon; “but if I am thinking of something, I don’t know how it’s to be done—with safety.”

“Safety be d——d!” cried Sir Robert. “Nothing venture, nothing win. I’m a desperate man, and shall go ahead—neck or nothing. If it’s a plan to get hold of the girl, out with it; it shall be done.”

“Yes, it’s all very well for you to say it shall be done, Barclay; but as I run some risk, I’ve got a voice in the matter.”

The baronet took a seat opposite to him at the table, and dashed his hand down so heavily as to make the other start nervously.

“Now, look here, Algernon; you’ve been sponging on me for more than a year—ever since your guardian cut off your allowance. You’re head over ears in debt, and if you don’t do something you’ll be arrested; and then you know what chance you have of getting a single sovereign from the earl, either during his life or by will. You’ll be a beggar, and have to go to Whitecross Street. Money you must have, and money you haven’t got. I know you’ve got the cunning of the serpent; so out with the infernal scheme you’ve got in your head, or, by——! I’ll have you arrested this very night.”

Algernon turned pale. The violent temper of the

baronet always frightened and unnerved him, and his weaker will succumbed.

“Well, it’s a dangerous game,” he said, sullenly.

“If successful, will it put the girl in my hands—in my legal power?”

“Yes.”

“Then the risk is worth the chance,” said Sir Robert; “so speak out.”

Algernon still hesitated.

“Speak out, man. What! still afraid? Let’s see if this will give you heart.”

With the words, he poured out a tumblerful of brandy, and handed it to his pusillanimous friend.

The latter, despite the insulting words and contemptuous manner, drank it off.

Sir Robert said no more for some time; but throwing his legs over the arm of an easy chair, lighted a cigar, and waited, looking with ill-disguised scorn on his companion.

“Well,” he said, presently, “you remember that Carmichael girl, in Dumfries—four miles from your place in Scotland.”

“I know that you used to be spooning—and lying, I have no doubt—to some Scotch wench in the neighbourhood. All I’ve got to say is, that she was a fool to listen to you.”

“Now, look here, Barclay; you’re not the man to sneer at me about lying to a girl; you’ve got nothing to boast of.”

“Go ahead, my good fellow, do. Don’t let’s wrangle about terms,” said the other, shortly; “the long and the short of the matter is this, that you and

I both want money—you forty or fifty thousand, and I considerably over a hundred thousand. If you don't get it, you'll have to go to prison, or hang yourself, or something of that sort. As for me I shall go abroad for a year or so. I can still raise a thousand or two, I've no doubt. There's the plate. I haven't touched that yet. I tell you what it is Algernon," he cried, all at once starting to his feet, "if you've got nothing to propose, I've a great mind to raise a few thousands at once, and go and see this Captain O'Rourke, whose advertisement you showed me in *Bell's Life*. I'd not be worried by duns in London, or the country either. I'd put the sea between me and my difficulties, and who knows what may turn up ? "

"And what about me? I've got no notion of the sort—not such a fool."

"Yes, you," said the baronet. "Why you must just go to the devil your own way—that is to say, if you've got no new idea as to how Maude may be got hold of."

"I've got an idea."

"Out with it then: something about Ellen Carmichael; if you think that she'll help you, you're mistaken. She does not like you."

"I didn't mean Ellen Carmichael."

"What the deuce did you mean, then?"

"Her brother, John Carmichael."

"How do you know he will help you in anything against Maude? Just remember that she was very good to old Bailie Carmichael of Dumfries whe' he was in trouble."

The younger man here seemed to gather heart (perhaps it was the brandy).

“Ha, ha,” he laughed scornfully; “no fear of that. If he’ll do anything against his own sister, he won’t stand nice at anyone else’s.”

“Ah! I see. A nice pair of beauties.

“*Arcades ambo
Et cantare pares, et respondere parati.*”

“Curse your Latin,” said Algernon. “I never could manage Virgil at Eton.”

“No, I should think not, nor anything else,” sneered Sir Robert; “but get ahead—what about Ellen Carmichael, daughter of the old Bailie of Dumfries?”

“Of her, not much,” was the reply. “Of her brother, a good deal.”

“What will he do?”

“Anything if he’s paid for it.”

“Be more definite. Name a thing that he’ll do.”

“Forgery,” replied Algernon.

“Oh, and you see a way to make his forgery useful?”

“Yes.”

“In what way?”

“Get possession of Maude.”

“How?”

“By the strong arm of the law.”

“And what about the consequences?”

“John Carmichael and you must arrange about that. I shall keep clear of the law.”

“Coward and scoundrel,” muttered Sir Robert,

between his teeth—who, though he was the latter, was not wanting in pluck. Then aloud: “And do you think John Carmichael is fool enough to commit forgery, and take the risk?”

“Yes, if he sees his way to enough money to take him abroad, and give him a good start. He’s in trouble already, and would only be too glad of the chance.”

“How much would he want?”

“I daresay three or four hundred pounds would satisfy him.”

“Will you arrange it?”

“No, not about the money. I’ll break the ice, tell you my plan, and then you must do the rest yourself.”

“Very well. Let me hear it. Fill up your glass. If you haven’t got the real thing, the next best is Dutch courage.”

The other said nothing. He was pretty well accustomed to the sneers and taunts of Sir Robert. Naturally mean and cowardly by nature, what would have infuriated any man with spirit, he cared little for, or if he did care, very seldom showed it.

So he quietly filled his glass and went on—

“John Carmichael has been in the constabulary, and is, as you know, the son of a bailie.”

“Upon my soul I didn’t know it; but we’ll take that for granted. Go on.”

“His sister for some reason or other left home against her father’s wish and is now in London. She’s got a situation as barmaid, at the Turk’s

Head' near Tavistock-square. I've been to see her there several times."

"Well, I told you before you could do nothing with the girl."

"That may be; but I can with John. He has been sent by his father to persuade Ellen to return home, and the old man entrusted him with sufficient funds for the purpose. This he has spent, and also a further remittance he got from Scotland. Now he's regularly down, and is hanging about, sponging on the girl. I can see him any time. He'll do anything for money."

"Go on."

"He's tolerably well acquainted with their signature."

"Yes."

"And with his father, the bailie's."

"That I can well believe. Shouldn't be surprised if he had written it before now."

"That's just it. A warrant signed by Scotch justices, countersigned by the Bailie of Dumfries, and in the hands of a Scotch constable, would command respect in England."

Sir Robert saw what he was driving at, but determined to make him reveal the whole of his scheme.

"A warrant! To what effect?"

"To arrest the party named therein, and take her to Scotland."

"You mean Maude?"

"Just so."

"But we have no warrant."

“ John Carmichael has got blank forms ; and, if it’s made worth his while, will fill one up, and, what’s more, execute it.”

There was a silence of some considerable duration. Sir Robert seemed to be deeply considering the chances of success.

“ Hum ! ah ! I see a dangerous game ; but the prize is worth it. We’ll do it, Algernon.”

“ Very good. Then I’ll put things in train.”

“ When ?”

“ Now, at once. I shall want some money to work with.”

“ Here’s a ten pound note.”

“ Where shall I see you this evening ?”

“ Here, or at the club,” replied Sir Robert, rising and yawning. “ As for me I shall go and see this fellow who advertises—Captain O’Rourke. If this affair fails to come off I must leave England, and may as well have some sport as not.”

So they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO THE "TURK'S HEAD"
TAVERN AND TO ELLEN CARMICHAEL.

THERE was nothing remarkable about the parlour of the "Turk's Head" tavern, or indeed about the house at all.

It was kept by a widow woman named McCarthy, who had as assistants in the business a man and a barmaid.

The latter—a tall, handsome, fair-haired girl—is the Ellen Carmichael, sister of John Carmichael, before spoken of. The latter, a dissipated, worthless scamp, spent much of his time at the "Turk's Head;" for being without money he had contrived to establish a friendship on the strength of his relationship to Ellen.

On the evening in question the parlour is empty, with the exception of the said John, who is sitting over the fire with a glass of whisky and water on the table before him, moodily smoking a long clay pipe. Presently, as he thus sits, he hears a voice in the bar, and rising, mutters—

"That fellow after Ellen again. I must try and bleed him or else stop his game."

So rising, he went out into the bar, where

fashionably-dressed gentleman was leaning over, talking to the handsome fair-haired Ellen.

He just nodded to John as he saw him, and went on talking as though scarcely interested in his presence. But, nevertheless, he furtively watched him out of the corner of his eye; and when he re-entered the parlour, said to the barmaid—

“Just give me a cigar, young lady. I’ll go in the parlour and sit by the fire a bit.”

The girl gave him a cigar, and as she did so looked keenly at him. Something, she knew not what, in his manner impressed her.

When he had gone into the room she said to herself,—

“That man is after something with John. I wonder what. He watched as a cat might a mouse and thought not I noticed it. I’d like to know his business with John. He doesn’t come here to set in the parlour and smoke bad cigars. It’s me he comes to see, as a rule, and not John. The fool thinks I am to be caught by his aristocratic name—thinks that because he is a fine gentleman, I a poor girl, that I am to be beguiled by his fine speeches and flattery. I’d rather have a barefooted gillie from the Scotch hills than a dozen such fellows as my Lord Algernon.”

Business was slack that afternoon. There was no one in the bar, and the street being quiet she could hear the dull hum of conversation in the parlour.

Lord Algernon and her brother were in earnest conversation. For some time she sat listlessly enough, but all at once started up, her cheek flushing.

She had heard a word or two of the conversation—a lady's name.

"Lady Maude!" she murmured. "They're talking of Lady Maude. Some villainy or other, I'll be bound. I'll listen."

Between the bar and parlour there was a window covered by a red curtain. It was closed, but Ellen softly raised it, and, leaning on the sill, listened to the talk between the two in the room with breathless interest.

As she did so she grew pale. With 'bated breath and parted lips she stood until the entrance of a customer called her away. Hastily serving him, she was about to return to the window, but the landlady's voice from the bar-parlour called her away, and she heard no more.

But what she had heard had greatly unsettled her.

"I will warn Lady Maude," she said. "I will put her on her guard—this very afternoon—at once: there is no time to be lost."

So she asked leave of the landlady to go out to make a purchase, and hastily putting on her bonnet and shawl, called a cab, and told the driver to take her to No. 7, Eaton Square.

She had not been gone long when Lord Algernon and John Carmichael came out of the parlour together.

"Then you'll do it?" said the former.

"I'll think of it," was the reply. "I don't like the job; it's all but hanging matter."

"Nonsense, man alive!—only just a freak of Sir Robert's."

“Don’t tell me. Sir Robert may have more money than he can well spend; but he’s not the man to give hundreds of pounds just for a freak. Hundreds you said, you know Lord Algernon.”

“I don’t promise anything. I’ve just told you what I believe Sir Robert will do in the event of your carrying out his wishes. You’d better see himself; and mind! I’ve got nothing to do with this at all; I’ve brought you a message from Sir Robert, and just hinted a little to you as to the nature of the trifling service he requires.”

“Trifling service! Forgery—disgrace—ruin—the hulks; that’s what your proposal means,” replied John Carmichael, bitterly.

“Hush! Don’t say such words. Ellen may hear you.”

As Lord Algernon spoke he looked around the bar for the girl who was his original attraction to the house.

“Where’s Miss Ellen, Mrs. McCarthy?” he asked of the landlady.

“Gone out, all of a hurry. Wouldn’t be said ‘no’ to. Looked pale and frightened like. She’s a strange girl. I can’t make her out.”

No more was said, and Lord Algernon took his leave.

The same evening John Carmichael called on Sir Robert, at his club in St. James’s Street. The baronet came out and stood on the steps talking to him, carelessly picking his teeth the while, as though the subject of conversation was of no importance whatever.

THE DIAMOND CROSS,

“Then you’ll do it?”

“A man will do much for gold: sell his soul, I’m told, sometimes,” was the reply.

“Certainly, why not? If he wants money, and doesn’t care about his soul, I don’t see the least reason why he shouldn’t do so,” said Sir Robert, cynically.

“But the price, Sir Robert; you have not definitely told me the sum I’m to have.

“What was Lord Algernon to give you for your sister?”

“For my sister!” faltered John Carmichael: “I don’t understand, sir.”

“Oh, yes, you do! What was he to give you for your aid in his design on your sister Ellen? The reason I ask is, because I’ll give you twenty times the sum for doing this business for me.”

He coloured up, and seemed inclined to take offence and answered sulkily,—

“If it is done I shall have to go abroad—spend the rest of my days in a foreign country.”

“So much the worse for the foreign country,” said Sir Robert, in the same sneering, taunting tone.

He was a man who thoroughly despised the human instruments he used for his villainous ends, and delighted in making them feel his scorn. Utterly unscrupulous, selfish, cruel, and remorseless, he was emphatically a bold villain, and so far immeasurably superior to Lord Algernon, who had nothing to recommend him, save his cunning.

“Well, Sir Robert, I couldn’t go abroad under three or four hundred pounds,”

“The deuce you couldn’t!” replied the baronet, smiling grimly, and carelessly tapping his boot with his cane. “Many a man’s gone for nothing, and never come back. I wonder what a convict’s life at the other side of the globe is like.”

John Carmichael turned pale, but said nothing.

“Very well, then, four hundred pounds be it; to be paid you when the person in question is safely over the border and delivered at my place. I suppose you want some now?”

“I have no money, Sir Robert.”

“Here are two or three sovereigns. Now mind what you are about. It must be done quietly. Not in London, if it can be helped. I think that she will try to go abroad in a few days: should she do so then would be your chance. The very fact of her attempting to leave the country would give colour to your story of her being a criminal flying from justice. I am to be found at any time, as until this little game is played out—finally settled one way or another—I shall never go away from my chambers or club without leaving word where I am to be found.”

“What a vagabond the fellow is,” said Sir Robert to himself, as he lit a cigar; “in fact what a pair of vagabonds. Here’s this fellow willing to sell his sister to Algernon for a few pounds, and that worthy himself is only too glad to sell his to me. The only difference is in the price. Fifty thousand pounds is a good sum, but then Maude’s worth it.”

Thought John Carmichael, as he walked away with Sir Robert’s gold in his pocket—

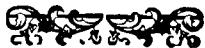
“What a villain he is! what a cold blooded

scoundrel ! what a demon the man is ! I'm afraid of him. I've a great mind to give this job up ; but I must have money. Four hundred pounds ! I an't go back to Scotland, and I can't live here or anywhere without money. But what when this is all gone ! Well then, I must put the screw on, and bleed Sir Robert again. It's one consolation that it'll always be in my power to convict him of being an accomplice.'

Hugging this thought to his breast, John Carmichael made his way back to the "Turk's Head."

His sister had not yet returned.

"I wonder where she's gone," he said. "I never knew her go out all of a sudden like this before."



AND HOW I WON IT.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY MAUDE AND HER MINIATURE.

ELLEN CARMICHAEL went straight, as the reader knows, to No. 7, Eaton Square.

In the handsome drawing room of the mansion two ladies were seated, in earnest conversation ; one about five-and-thirty, the other a lovely and delicate girl of eighteen or nineteen.

“ Oh ! Clara, you cannot reassure me. I tell you for certain that I am watched—dogged about night and day, by the creatures of that terrible man.”

“ Well, my dear child, if it is so, you are in no danger so long as you take precautions. If you never venture out alone, and avoid like pestilence all secluded places, you are safe. The audacious attempt of the other night would never have been made, had you not been so mad as to venture out at night, and on such a night, into St. James’s Park.”

“ I was so certain that the letter was from Ellen Carmichael ; and it was so artfully worded that I felt certain the poor girl was in some sad trouble. I can’t think who could have written it. I’m certain it was not Ellen. She is devoted to me.”

“ Your beautiful brother perhaps.”

“ Ah ! no ; he was never clever at imitating hand-writing.”

“Don’t you think it possible my dear Maude, that he may have persuaded this girl to write to you ; perhaps not letting her know the reason ? You told me that you had reason to believe he was smitten with the girl’s good looks.”

“Yes, that is true enough ; but you don’t know Ellen Carmichael. I saw her and asked her point blank. She declared to me she knew nothing whatever about it.”

At this moment a servant entered the room.

“A young woman who says her name is Carmichael wishes to see Lady Maude.”

“Will you see her dear ?” said Mrs. Wyndham, the mistress of the house. “By all means, show her up.”

In a moment or two Ellen Carmichael entered the room.

“What is it, my good girl ?” said Lady Maude, gently. “You look pale and frightened. Are you in any trouble ?”

“Not for myself, Lady Maude ; not for myself, but for you.”

“For me ?”

“You are in danger again. I overheard some words of a conversation about you.”

“A conversation between whom ?”

“Between Lord Algernon—and, my lady, I am ashamed to speak it—between Lord Algernon and my brother.”

“Between my brother and yours. What could Algernon have to say about me ?”

“It is about you and Sir Robert, Lady Maude.

They are determined to gain their end. The law is on their side. They are going to apply for a warrant."

"For a warrant against me?" cried Lady Maude. "Oh, heavens! is it possible that the law of this country, which they call free England, can be so cruel? What shall I do? Clara—Mrs. Wyndham—do advise me! The law is on their side. They are going to carry me off by force."

Lady Maude seemed almost distracted with terror.

"Calm yourself, my dear girl. I scarcely think it is possible they will attempt such a thing, and even if they do that they can succeed."

"Oh! yes, they will, they will, I'm sure they will. Algernon is cunning and crafty; Sir Robert bold and determined. They have the law on their side. I'm sure they have, or they would not be so audacious. Oh! what an unhappy day was that wen I went to Scotland, and fell into such a perfidious trap. What shall I do? Clara, do save me from this man. Ah! would to heaven I could find some one to protect me."

She threw herself on the sofa, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

"I must escape; I must fly; I must leave this country where the cruel laws, made by men, give men such terrible power. Why does not my sister write? Not a word, not a line from her. Oh! if I only knew where she was!"

"My dear child, that is obviously the reason why she has not written. Your letter has not reached her, but doubtless it will in a day or two."

“I will wait two days more, and then at all hazards I will fly the country. Surely there is no treaty by which they can seize me in France, in Russia or Italy, for I have committed no crime.”

“My dear Maude, let me advise you to wait until you hear from your sister. Think of your position in a foreign country—alone, unprotected!”

“I cannot be in a worse position than I am now—in constant terror—afraid to move out lest I should be seized by that unscrupulous man. I will wait a few days—not many—and then I will seek safety in flight. This state of dread in which I live will drive me mad.”

“Lady Maude,” said Ellen Carmichael, “if you go abroad to escape from your persecutors, let me go back with you. I shall not return to Scotland, and life as a barmaid in a public-house is hateful to me. Let me go, too, I beg of you. Besides, I may be of use to you. I am not timid, and woman’s wit is sometimes a match for man’s cunning.”

Lady Maude eagerly seized the offer.

“Yes, yes, Ellen, I know I can trust you. Come at once—come now, and stay with me—that is,” she added, hurriedly, “if Mrs. Wyndham will allow me.”

“My dear child,” that lady said, “deal with my house as your own.”

“Then I will come this very afternoon,” Ellen cried, “and Mrs. McCarthy may provide herself with another barmaid.”

Ellen Carmichael took her leave, promising to return in a few hours.

Lady Maude was long before she recovered from the effects of the bad news Ellen had brought her. It not only confirmed her fears that she was watched day and night, but added fresh alarms. She believed that she had been thoroughly outwitted by her enemies, and considered that she was hopelessly in the toils, with no chance of escape—unless she could evade the danger by crossing the sea to a foreign land, where the English law, so cruel and one-sided, as she thought as regarded women, did not hold sway.

Without any protection of the other sex—left alone, almost friendless, and with those who should have been her natural champions either indifferent or arrayed against her, no wonder that the poor girl's heart sank within her, and all she thought of was escape from present peril.

It is true she had female friends, amongst whom she could number Mrs. Wyndham, a wealthy widow. But one male relation, with the right and will to protect her, would have been worth more to her than a dozen lady friends, who, though they might have every desire to protect and reassure her, yet lacked the moral courage and knowledge of the world of men.

As she was firmly persuaded that she had been entrapped, and that the stern English law gave her enemies an advantage over her, she was as wretched and disconsolate a poor maiden as it is possible to conceive.

Mrs. Wyndham, thinking that repose would best benefit her, presently withdrew from the room, leaving Maude alone with her sorrow.

"It is a shame," she cried, passionately, after a time, as she paced up and down the room, her small hands clenched, her cheeks flushed (for now her emotion had taken another form), "a cruel shame that I, of all girls in the world, should have no one to protect, no one to love me, save those of my own sex."

She checked herself all at once, for her thoughts reverted to the scene in the park, when Roland Dane came to the rescue.

A deeper colour mounted to her fair cheek at thoughts which would intrude unbidden.

"I do believe that gentleman would aid me all in his power, if he only knew; but I cannot tell him, he is so reckless, so audacious; no, I dare not ask him to advise and help me. And yet, and yet," she murmured, "I feel sure that my appeal would not pass unheeded. I know he would try his best, and I think—yes, I really do believe—he would be able to do me good service. Perhaps, as a very last resource, if I am again in imminent peril of capture, I may appeal to him. Alas! how miserable it is to be so lonely—without brothers worthy of the name—without even a father, uncle, or male friend—with-out—"

Again came the conscious blush. What was she about to say? Was she without a lover?

That conscious blush would seem to say yes. And after all, was it not natural that some such thought should frame itself in the fair damsel's mind?

For princess or peasant-girl, woman's nature is ever the same—yearning to love and to be loved.

And so meek Lady Maude could not succeed entirely in banishing from her thoughts Roland Dane, who, like a knight of old, had come to her aid when it was so sorely needed.

“I wish I were poor,” she said; “I wish even I could gain possession of the great fortune I shall have when I am twenty-one years old—I would give it all away, or throw it into this, just keeping only enough to live on—perhaps a hundred pounds a year. Then, perhaps, wicked, selfish men would leave me alone and cease to persecute me. But he shall not gain his end—no, no, a thousand times no. I will kill myself—I hate him so! They tell me,” she mused on, “that I shall have more than a quarter of a million of money, besides lands and houses, when I am of age. I would give it all—every sixpence—to have some one on who I could depend, to who I could look up, sure of wise counsel and protection.”

Then she stopped before an *escritoire*, and opening it, took out a charming miniature portrait of herself, set with costly gems.

“I said I would send it to him,” she muttered, “and I must keep my word—but not yet, not yet. No, I will wait till the last thing, the very last; and if I am in danger I will send it as a token, and then, then I shall learn if there is one in the world who will champion me, albeit without hope of reward.”

She put back the portrait, and then reclining on the ottoman, lapsed into sad and dreary reverie.

None that looked at her as she lay back—so pale, beautiful, and fragile in appearance—could fail to be moved to admiration and pity.

It has been truly said that there is no solitude so oppressive as that amidst a crowd.

May it not be said also that there is no loneliness, such as that conferred by high position and great wealth, for the possessor thereof is too often sought and courted for those advantages, and cannot count on one sincere, disinterested friend. And thus fair Lady Maude persuaded herself it was in her case, with the sole exception of her sister and her sister's husband ; and they, alas ! were far away—nor knew she were.



CHAPTER VIII.

SIR ROBERT BARCLAY PERFECTS HIS PLANS, AND
MAUDE RECEIVES A LETTER.

SIR ROBERT BARCLAY, as he paces to and fro in the smoking-room of his club, is obviously in no amiable mood.

His mournful, saturnine face is rendered dark by a frowning scowl which sits upon it. But for the dark, forbidding aspect of his countenance, the baronet would certainly have been a handsome man.

The cast of his features was aquiline, and they are individually both good and regular.

In body he is tall, well and strongly built.

His face, however, seems capable of but two expressions—at one time a sneering smile, and when that is not observable, there is a black scowl, which gives the face a forbidding appearance.

Presently his friend, or rather his companion in villainy—Lord Algernon—enters.

Sir Robert has obviously been waiting for him, for he at once asks—

“ Well, what news to-day? More delay—more beating about the bush on the part of that cur, John Carmichael?”

“ Well, I have good news, but with a qualification.”

“ Let’s hear the good news first, by all means.”

“ Well, then, Carmichael has got over his scruples, and has actually filled up and signed the warrant.”

“ Got over his scruples—his *fears*, you mean,” said the other, sneeringly.

“ Well, his *fears*, then. He has signed the warrant and all that we have to do now is to catch our bird. It will never do as long as she keeps the house in London. I’ve ascertained, for one thing, that this Mrs. Wyndham, with whom she is staying, has a brother, a barrister, in good practice, a queen’s counsel, in fact. If she were to be taken in her house or in her company, she would immediately send off to him for advice, and the whole thing would be instantly discovered.”

“ I don’t advocate half measures,” replied the other. “ If the thing is to be attempted, let it be done at once and done thoroughly.”

“ Just so ; but it would be madness not to wait for the most favourable opportunity. It would be imperilling ourselves ; and remember, that if brought home to us this would prove to be a serious affair.”

“ There you go again—always thinking of your safety. You live, my good fellow, in a constant state of alarm and terror.”

Lord Algernon, used to the scornful words of his companion, made no reply, and presently the latter spoke again,—

“ Well I don’t know that it matters much. I daresay you heard me mention this fellow’s sister, Ellen Carmichael, that she had suddenly disappeared. The landlady of the ‘ Turk’s Head ’ either can’t or won’t give any information, and her brother

solemnly declares he doesn't know what she has done with herself. I found out about her to-day—saw her in the street, purely by accident."

"Well?"

"Ellen Carmichael is with Maude."

Sir Robert did not often break into oaths and fits of rage. His temper generally manifested itself by bitter sneers, cynical scorn; but this time he was betrayed from his usual saturnine equanimity.

A dark blue shade came on his face, and he cried, "D——n!" thereby considerably astonishing the waiter, who had at that moment entered the smoking-room.

Lord Algernon absolutely started, and said,—

"Yes, I do. By heavens! that girl will ruin all. You, with all your cleverness, must be as infernal a fool as you are a rogue. Does it not strike you that in all probability this girl Ellen—on whom you have been wasting your time uselessly, by the way—has somehow got hold of an inkling of our scheme. It may be through your bungling. Perhaps she got it from that fool of a brother of hers. Any way, there's a great chance she knows or suspects something. And, at all events, her being with Maude will render the affair much more difficult. Maude is timid, suspicious, and nervous; while she is as full of pluck and energy as you are wanting in those qualities. Two women together are always dangerous—often more than a match for a man,—and this girl is shrewd and clever—too clever for you, sharp as you think yourself. You thought, vain ass that you are, that you could get round her with your soft speeches,

and you've been most confoundedly taken in, for she's only been laughing at you the whole time. But there, there—it's no use talking about it. What's done can't be helped. We must seize the first possible opportunity and make the attempt."

"It's my opinion that Maude contemplates a bolt. I tried to see her so as to sound her ; but it was no use. I knew she was in, for she had been seen at the window a short time before by some of my spies. 'Not at home' was the answer though, with which of course I was obliged to put up. It was out of the question attempting to force my way into Mrs. Wyndham's house. Had it been Maude it would have been different."

"It was like your d----d impudence, after what happened the other night, attempting to see her. You might have known she would have nothing to say to you. It would have been a wonderful thing if she had, that's all I've got to say. So you think she'll try to get abroad ?" he said, abruptly changing the subject.

"I do feel pretty well sure of it. She'll try and join my married sister, Ethel."

"If once she gets abroad it's all over. That must be stopped at all events. See that the house is watched night and day. Have cabs and messengers in readiness to dash off instantly to let us know if she comes out of the house. If she does attempt it, we must seize her at the port from which she intends to embark. Folkestone or Dover, I suppose. Wherever it may be we must be there too, and in time to stop her. Where's that fellow Carmichael ?

Keep a sharp look out on him. See that he does not get drunk, and keep him up to the mark."

Sir Robert as he spoke was pacing hurriedly up and down, his hands behind him, and was more nervous and excited than Lord Algernon had ever before seen him.

"I tell you what should be done," said the latter.

"We should communicate with an inspector at Bow-street. Say that we are on the watch for a criminal, who would probably try to fly the country, and for whose apprehension there was a warrant out. Then arrange so that at a short notice, on our producing this warrant, and the supposed Scotch constable, we might get the services of half-a-dozen policemen in case of necessity."

"What necessity can arise?" asked Sir Robert.

"The danger is, I think, lest she should escape. There is none whatever that she will attempt resistance. She is far too timid for that. Why, she was so frightened the other night that she could not run when she had the opportunity."

"Ah! but, Sir Robert, I must remind you of your own words. She has now got Ellen Carmichael with her, and two women may have sense enough to lay their heads together, and procure escort of some kind. Who knows? It is as well to be prepared."

"Just so. Will you see to it?"

"No, thank you, Sir Robert—by your leave, I told you that I would think this matter out and arrange all details; but I should not appear in it."

"Coward," muttered Sir Robert.

"Possibly," replied Lord Algernon quietly, well

used to such language from the baronet. "Anyhow, I mean to be on the safe side."

"Well, well, since your poor heart fails you, I'll see to it. I'll go and call on the inspector and see what's to be done. You keep a bright look-out. It is now five o'clock," looking at his watch. "I shall dine in a quarter-of-an-hour here, then go on to Bow-street, and then to the Cavendish Hotel, where these fellows meet about that advertisement, and you'll know where to find me if I'm wanted."

Lord Algernon lifted his eye-glass.

"What," he said, "do you still entertain the idea of throwing away five hundred pounds in a dead swindle?"

"It's no swindle. They may be a lot of madmen, but it's *boná fide*."

"Well, then, all I've got to say is, you're the greatest madman of the lot. You don't catch me joining in any such mad enterprise. They're sure to get into trouble."

"Then they must get out again and I among them," rejoined Sir Robert, shortly. "I tell you that if this attempt on Maude fails, the affair must be given up for a time at least. It is absolutely necessary I should leave England or obtain a large sum shortly. In the course of a year, Maude may be off her guard, and we may succeed. At present, failing this last attempt, it must be given up; and, as I said, it is important that I should be out of the way for a time. I want excitement, action, anything to banish the memory of past failures. D—— it, man, you haven't the heart of a mouse, or you'd feel the same.'

“Just as you like,” replied the other, quietly. “Then you will be found at the Cavendish Hotel if you’re wanted.”

“Yes; my man, Jaspar, will wait in the hall.”

Lord Algernon then took his leave, and Sir Robert, after pacing up and down for some time muttering to himself, descended to the dining-room and ordered dinner.

* * * * *

While this conversation was going on between the two conspirators—for such they may fairly be called—another was being carried on between their intended victim and Ellen Carmichael.

Lady Maude had an open letter in her hand, which she read again and again, with evident pleasure.

“My Poor timid Maude,—Silly little frightened gazelle that you are, what strange fancies you conjure up about dreadful conspiracies against you!

“Your letter has only just come to hand, having been forwarded after us.

“Your imagination misleads you, for, of course, I cannot believe that you can really be in personal danger in happy, free England. What can be the circumstances which you cannot write, but must wait till you see me? As to the adventure in the Park, which you speak of, and call a terrible and desperate attempt to carry you off by force, that is, in all probability due to your excited imagination. In my opinion, the men were vulgar thieves, tolerably well dressed, as are the members of the swell-mol. Their

object was not your pretty little self, but your purse, watch, and other valuables.

“ Nevertheless, I shall be happy to see you—happy to have you constantly with us. Come on as soon as ever you please, and telegraph when you are coming.

“ We are now in Geneva—are going on to Florence, thence to Rome, and probably to Naples. But your plan will be to come to this address at Geneva, where if we have gone, you will find our route left.

“ The Prince joins in kind regards and love.

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ ETHEL.”

It was the last part of this letter which gave the Lady Maude such pleasure.

“ Ah ! ” she cried, clasping it to her breast, “ I knew that Ethel would not desert me. Only think, Ellen ! in a few days we shall be in Geneva, with a powerful protector, far from those wicked men and their machinations. We will start at once—this very night. The few boxes I shall require are all ready packed. Do, Ellen, find out how we are to go ; you are so clever, and can make out these puzzling railway guides. Is there a train to-night ? ”

Ellen Carmichael seemed wrapped in deep thought, leaning against the mantel-piece, with her hands clasped before her ; she merely bowed her head in acknowledgment of Lady Maude’s speech.

She was an exceedingly handsome girl—tall, with commanding carriage, somewhat proud expression of face, and with an abundance of bright fair hair. A

girl with a strong will and good courage—not a girl to be won easily and made a fool of; quiet, sedate, and generally reserved, one could read thought in the clear blue eye and square forehead.

“What are you thinking of, Ellen?” said Lady Maude. “Do tell me. Don’t have any secret from me. You know you are one of the very few friends upon whom I can count.”

Ellen Carmichael’s position with Lady Maude was not, be it understood, of a menial nature, though the girl herself would have been quite willing to serve her in the capacity of lady’s maid. To this, however, Maude would not consent, and Ellen was looked upon and treated as a companion and friend.

Ellen was both less timid and more cautious than Lady Maude. She would never have been beguiled by a forged letter to a rendezvous at night, alone, in St. James’s Park, and now saw dangers and difficulties ahead, of which Maude, in her joy at hearing from her sister, took no heed.

“I was thinking,” said Ellen, “that we might be followed. I am almost sure you are watched night and day, and equally sure that if opportunity offers another desperate attempt will be made. I saw your brother this morning, Lady Maude, and though he tried to be pleasant, and talk flattering nonsense, I am sure he was disconcerted at meeting me so near where you live. He and others are watching the house, and, such being the case, they have some sinister motive, in my opinion.”

“What, then, do you advise, Ellen? What is it that you fear?”

“I fear lest we should be followed: lest those who are your enemies should actually come in the same train, and choose some spot more quiet and secluded than London for their attempt, if they are resolved on one.”

“Then what is to be done? How can the danger be remedied?” she asked distractedly.

“Money is no object to you, Lady Maude.”

“No, no, Safety! Escape, at any cost! *Mon Dieu*, I would give all I possess, or ever shall possess, to be sure of that.”

“Then I suggest a special train, to the port from which you will embark for the Continent.”

“Yes, yes; by all means a special train!” said Lady Maude.

“It will cost, perhaps, a hundred pounds.”

“No matter if it is a thousand. See to it, dear Ellen; I leave myself in your hands.”

“And now in case, in spite of all precautions, we are followed, and there is a probability of another attempt being made, do you know no one on whom you can depend for aid and protection? No gentleman, I mean. You see we are but two weak women, and in case of actual violence should be helpless.”

Lady Maude hesitated, blushed, then began to speak, and stopped.

“I think I do know one gentleman who would do his very best, but I should not like to ask, except in the last resort. It is the one who so gallantly came to my aid in the park that dreadful night.”

“Then if you can depend upon him why not send for him, and tell him how you are situated?”

“Oh, no, no!” she said shuddering. “I cannot tell, and I don’t wish to send to him if I can possibly help it.”

“Very well, then, we will leave it until an ~~actual~~ emergency arises.”

Ellen Carmichael looked curiously at Lady Maude, as though not quite able to understand her embarrassment and unwillingness.

“I will go out now and attend to it at once, Lady Maude. I will do my best to avoid being followed. If I am so, I cannot help it. I will make all enquiries about the train and steamboat and everything, and in the mean time you can be getting ready.”

“Don’t be long, Ellen dear. Mrs. Wyndham is out, and I shall be so dreadfully frightened, all alone.”

“I will make all possible haste, Lady Maude—shall not be more than an hour and a half probably.”

Ellen Carmichael had not been long in London. Nevertheless, she was gifted with that quiet self-possession which enabled her to find her way about without difficulty.

On this occasion, despite all her precautions, she was followed—keen eyes being on her all the while.

But now for a space we will return to our twenty companions.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO SOME OF
THE TWENTY CAPTAINS.

THE advertisement we have before alluded to, and which was posted in the council chamber over the head of the President, not unnaturally attracted a great deal of attention and curiosity.

Some laughed at it as a ridiculous hoax ; others declared that it was got up by a gang of swindlers, while others believed that it was *bona fide*, but that the advertisers and projectors were madmen.

We wish to call the reader's attention to a few of those who read this singular production.

It was read by Roland Dane, whose hot blood was instantly fired thereby, and as the reader knows, hence the application to his uncle, in a worldly sense foolish and improvident, and hence his presence in London.

Read was it too by Richard Rollo, called Dare-Devil Dick, a squire's son in Roland's neighbourhood, the spendthrift scion of an old and fortune-broken family.

He at once raised the required sum, and a hundred or so beyond, and hurrying to town, sought an interview with Captain O'Rourke, of Adelphi Chambers, London, and Ballysmashem Castle, Ireland.

Read was it too, at first with incredulity and con-

tempt, afterwards with interest, finally with eager attention, by Captain Carrambole, a man about town, living by his wits, gentlemanly exterior and manner, and by hanging on to wealthier men, as a rule not so hard-headed and 'cute as the gallant captain.

Read was it too by the Honourable Percy Claverton, second son of the Earl of Fitz-Maur, and worth £5,000 a-year by his mother's settlement, besides expectations.

To him the gallant captain (known amongst his intimates as Captain Cannon) showed the advertisement, and marking the effect as he read it, listened to the honourable as he pronounced it "a devilish good idea"—good mind to go in for it myself, only it's such a bawer.

Now the gallant Captain Carrambole was at that time in considerable money difficulties, and as several of the myrmidons of the Sheriff of Middlesex were looking after him, he was anxious to get away from the country altogether for a time.

"Don't see it at all, Claverton. Strikes me as just the thing for you. You seem to be pretty well tired of London, tired of this sort of life, having seen so much as you have, *blasé* in fact. Now, though you're rather a lazy devil, you've got plenty of pluck, brave as a lion, as I know. This would be the very thing for you."

"H—m—m, yes; I think I've got pluck," said the Honourable Percy, "and my fair share of it; but still you know, with my position, to go on a harum-scarum expedition like that would hardly be the thing, you know."

“Nonsense, just the thing—get your name up—make you the talk of all London when you come back. Gordon Cumming would be nothing to you. Quite a hero you’ll be. And then, you see, if you did go, of course the other fellows of the expedition would make you chief man among them, considering your position, and so on. By Jove, Claverton, it would be just the thing for you!”

The Honourable Percy still hesitated. He was very vain, and the Captain’s words had not been without effect; still it was a tremendous leap to take, and he felt it.

“Well, I tell you what,” said the Captain, seeing his hesitation. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, if I don’t, damme, though it will be very inconvenient to me just now. If you’ll go, I’ll go with you. Come, what do you say, eh?”

With the words he slapped him on the knee, and looked hard in his face.

The Honourable Percy was nervous, and dreaded ridicule above all things. Like many naturally timid men, he hated to be thought so, and this influenced his reply.

“Afraid—no—not likely. Yes, I’ll come.”

“That’s settled then. Just make a memorandum of it in my pocket-book, and I’ll do the same in yours. Sort of pledge, you know, that neither of us changes his mind, and makes a fool of the other.”

The Honourable Percy, not without some little misgiving, made the requisite entry in writing, according to the dictation of his cleverer and more hard-headed companion.

Thus it happened that the Honourable Mr Claverton, with five thousand pounds a-year and Captain Carrambole, without five hundred pence, both embarked in this enterprise, and were present at the council meeting, which was interrupted by the sudden appearance of that mysterious Lady Maude.

It was read too by Jack Rutter, a Yankee, living in London, who had roamed all over the world—as a sailor, gold digger in California, and had lived fourteen years among the savages of the South Sea Islands, on one of which he had been shipwrecked.

Jack Rutter, known among his acquaintance as the Cannibal, had friends well to do in America; but after leading for twenty years the life of a rover—after having enjoyed the wild liberty of the Pacific Islands, did not feel disposed to return to the farm in New England, where his people resided. He took up his abode in London, at a sailor's boarding-house in Ratcliffe Highway, where he contracted with the landlord for so much a week, and passed his time smoking, strolling about from one public-house to the other in the neighbourhood, and spinning yarns about his adventures in the South Seas.

It was often said, and never denied by the Cannibal, that he still hankered after his island home, and longed to revisit the pellucid water, the coral reef, surrounded lagoons—the sandy shores, and shady palm and cocoa-nut groves of the Polynesian Island, where for so many years he had lived. This surmise was not incorrect, for when by chance Jack Rutter fell across the advertisement, it instantly took his fancy. The allusion to a probable cruise to the Pacific

Islands was what principally fired his imagination, and he at once resolved to see about the matter. The result was that having somewhere about three hundred pounds, which he had brought with part of the fruits of a lucky hand at the Australian diggings, he wrote home to America for more, and resolved to be one of the twenty adventurers.

"If I must stump up the whole lot, I must," he said; "but I do think that arter cruisin' about all over the world for twenty years, more especially them South Sea Islands, I oughter go half price."

The advertisement also took the fancy of a Yankee colonel, who enjoyed the soubriquet of Buffalo Slack.

He had been for many years a buffalo hunter on the vast plains of Texas, and at this present time was by some chance or other in London, of which he was heartily sick.

He had been thinking for some time of going back to the old hunting grounds, and taking up with his former hard but healthy and free life af a prairie hunter, when the glowing announcement from the facile pen of Captain O'Rourke attracted his attention.

"The very thing, by thunder," cried Buffalo Slack, slapping his stalwart thigh with force enough to have broken that of a weak man. "I'm in among that lot. Tired o' buffalo! never saw an elephant or tiger in my life, let alone had a shot at the varmints. Reckon it'd be sport some. I'm off."

Mr. Therwald Thompson, another wild scapegoat, much after the style of Dick Rollo, and known, as

Tally-ho Thompson, from his reckless riding with the fox-hounds, also took it into his mad head that here was a capital chance for sport, fun, and excitement.

"Ever so much better than fox-hunting—we tire of that—and shooting partridges and pheasants, no harder to hit than owls. If it wasn't for the chance of getting one's neck broke, fox-hunting would be awfully slow; there isn't much glory in running down with twenty couple of hounds a poor sneaking, stinking, hunted vermin. No! I'll go in for better sport and bigger game; if this affair is *bonâ fide* I'll make one."

So Tally-ho Thompson came up to town and sought out Captain O'Rourke, with whom he was immensely pleased, and very soon made up his mind to be one of the Twenty Captains.

The next we come to of those who were present at the council meeting was Mr. Sextus Miller, F.R.S. and F.R.G.S.

He too resolved to go—but not from any idea of sport or love for adventure. His motive was one of a scientific nature. Certain observations of Jupiter's satellites from the southern hemisphere, and also researches concerning the parallax of the fixed stars, which could only be carried out by accurate observations from many different parts of the globe; it was in the hope of obtaining these that, after mature consideration, he resolved to offer himself. He was a profound astronomer and mathematician, and thought with reason that his scientific knowledge might be of great use in navigating the vessel.

Next we come to Mr. Dionysius Thorold, M.A., Cambridge. He too was a learned man, but by no means a milksop nor altogether a bookworm; for he had rowed in the University eight one year in the celebrated race between the light and dark blues from Putney to Mortlake; besides, he could handle the cricket bat, and was by no means a bad athlete.

He was engaged in a work partly of natural history, partly philosophical. He had some ideas of his own on the gradations and varieties of species, and wished to procure specimens of the animals, birds, &c., of foreign climates, for the double purpose of rendering his Natural History a complete and valuable standard work and also to advance his own particular ideas as to the origin and development of species.

Neither he nor the scientific gentleman before mentioned—Mr. Sextus Miller—dreamed for a moment of the nature of the enterprise in which they were about to embark as it developed itself.

Little did they imagine what wild, daring, and desperate adventures the Twenty Captains would be concerned in.

Had they done so—though both of them were brave men—it is certain that they would have hesitated to join, most probable that they would not have done so.

Mr. Benjamin Bouncer was a little man, full of energy and, as little men often are, inclined to be conceited and boastful. He was the son of a rich Liverpool merchant, and as he was of far too volatile a temperament to stick to business, his father

made him a handsome allowance, which he could well afford to do, and allowed him to do as he pleased.

So Mr. Bouncer, junior, coming across the advertisement, instantly decided that it was, as he expressed it—"just the sort of thing he was cut out for," and forthwith he went up to town, sought out the great O'Rourke, put his name down, and determined to make one of the party.

Dr. Columba was a surgeon without any practice and an M.D. of the Edinburgh University.

He was a cautious man, and did not care about investing his little capital (about a thousand pounds) in the purchase of a doubtful practice ; so at the time the advertisement appeared he was looking about for something to do.

He had several times thought of taking a berth as ship's surgeon ; and as he read the advertisement the thought occurred to him that the party would require a medical man among them, or, at all events that one would be exceedingly valuable in case of illness or accident.

So he carefully and slowly and cautiously thought the matter out, and came to the conclusion that it was a good opening for him. He thought that in all probability his professional services would be taken as a set-off against part of the money required.

So he too came to London, and, after much talk and consideration, put his name down on the list as a candidate whose special qualification gave him a claim for exemption from the full amount.

Next we come to John Talbot—a quiet, somewhat

lazy young man of eight-and-twenty—a good type of the Anglo-Saxon.

He was six feet two inches in height, broad-chested, with limbs like young saplings, and altogether looked one who would prove a formidable antagonist when once roused. As in habit he was indolent, in manner he was very quiet, in disposition easy-going and good-tempered.

He would have been good-looking, but for the stolid impassibility of his features, which, except when excited, lacked all expression. But when excited either by pleasure or anger, or any other cause, then it was different.

Fire flashed from the hitherto sleepy blue eye, his figure grew more erect, his broad shoulders were thrown back, his nostrils dilated, and a bright flush appeared on the usually pale and passionless face.

He was often chaffed and made fun of for these and other peculiarities; but though proud and conscious of his great strength, it would seem that he disdained to use it in anger, for it was a most difficult thing to provoke him or cause him to lose his usual equanimity.

He had enough to live on—indeed a very good income; and considering this and his singular apathetic nature, it may seem most extraordinary that he should think of embarking in an expedition which, to say the least, promised plenty of hard work, hardship—a great chance of hardship and danger. But stranger things than this happen.

John Talbot, though proof against all chaff from

men, was more vulnerable where women were concerned, and was repeatedly and mercilessly so served by several of the softer sex who delighted in tormenting him. The advertisement in question happened to attract his attention, and in his quiet way was amused thereby. Handing the paper to a young lady, to whose charms he was by no means indifferent, he said—

“There, Miss Laura Lynn, what do you think of that? I’ve a great mind to go.”

He had not the least intention of the kind when he spoke.

She read it, and then, a slight curl of the lip, and a tinge of irony in her tone, said—

“*You* go, Mr. John Talbot! Nonsense! You are a great deal to lazy. The idea of your hunting wild animals! I should as soon think of seeing an elephant dancing an hornpipe on its hind legs.”

This comparison of our lazy friend to an elephant elicited laughter from the company, and threath John Talbot felt considerably annoyed.

He said very little, however, but made up his mind to go, and he kept to his resolution.

A middle-aged, mysterious man, named Able Johnson, was also attracted by the fascinating propositions of Captain O’Rourke.

He lived in a little cottage in a little village in Gloucestershire all alone. His sole amusement was shooting, with rifle and fowling-piece; and though he lived in a frugal manner,—had no servant, save an old woman of the village, who came at night and went away in the morning,—he paid liberally for

the right to shoot over manors where game abounded.

With the rifle especially he was a crack shot, and could shoot wood-pigeons on the wing—a feat which few would even attempt.

Silent, saturnine, and uncommunicative, no one knew anything whatever about him—who he was, or where he came from.

He was not a man with any amount of education or refinement; that was obvious on a very slight acquaintance. But, nevertheless, he was gifted with great shrewdness; and his conversation, always free from romance, was cynical and matter-of-fact to a degree.

It was believed by some of the gossips of the village that the mystery which surrounded him was of the nature of an early crime, and that he wrapped himself up in the taciturn manner he did in order that no trace of his future life should ever be discovered.

Another character who resolved to make one of the twenty deserves a few words. This one was a retired blacksmith, who, having come into a small property by will, was persuaded by his neighbours that it was incumbent on him to lay down the hammer, give up the forge and smithy, and live on his means.

In an evil hour he took this advice, disposed of the business, and never ceased to regret it.

He was pained to feel this wearisome course of idleness. No more was his cheering voice heard accompanying the clanging of the hammer. He grew

dull and despondent, and even his physical strength fell off.

It used to be his boast—a true one—that he was the strongest man within twenty miles of his native village, and had overthrown every competitor in wrestling in every village within that radius.

Samson Slamm could not get back the smithy, and could not content himself with an idle life. Thus, with no better employment, he got into the habit of spending some hours every day in poring over the daily paper, which come down from London usually about noon. And thus it happened that he read and was impressed by O'Rourke's advertisement, and, weary of a lazy monotonous life, resolved to embrace the opportunity.

His Herculean frame, brawny muscles, and iron constitution adapted him well to a life of perilous adventure ; and as he had his share of the money at hand, O'Rourke at once decided that he was a fit and proper person to make one of the party.

Hector M'Ivor M'Gregor M'Nab was wont to assert that he was a lineal descendant of that celebrated outlaw, Rob Roy M'Gregor. He was a fire eating, dare-devil of a Scotchman ; tall built, bony and gaunt, and evidently endowed with great physical strength.

Oatmeal and the keen mountain air of his native Highlands, though they had put little flesh on the gigantic frame work of bone, had rendered every muscle hard and firm, and his thews and sinews were like bands of flexible steel. According to his own account he was the son of the head of the clan

M'Nab; the boast of which was that the men were all brave, the women all chaste.

However, he had not thought it derogatory to his dignity to serve as a soldier in a Scotch regiment, and in the Indian Mutiny had distinguished himself; and at the capture of Lucknow had come across valuable loot in the shape of jewels, at the sack of the Alumbagh Palace; which enabled him to purchase his discharge and retire to the barren moor in the Highlands which he dignified with the name of his ancestral estate. Probably the whole of it would not fetch a rent of fifty pounds a year; but that made no difference to Hector M'Nab.

When excited, he was ready for any insane attempt—was, in fact, half mad; but, strange to say, either by special luck, or by reason of his own strength and hardihood, he usually came out of all scrapes and personal encounters with flying colours.

Hector M'Nab; Samson Slamm, the blacksmith; and John Talbot, the quiet, lazy Saxon, were beyond all dispute the biggest and strongest men of the party.

There was many others who sought interviews with Captain O'Rourke, some of whom were afterwards admitted to fellowship; but we will not here more particularly describe them, but come at once to two personages whom we first introduced to the reader at the very commencement of our story.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALLOT COMMENCES, EACH CANDIDATE
BEING MYSTERIOUSLY BLACK-BALLED.

SIR ROBERT BARCLAY, after dinner, sauntered leisurely towards Cavendish Hotel, where our twenty associates were that night to hold a grand council, under the presidency of Captain O'Rourke. Sir Robert had seen that gentleman several times, and expressed his intention of joining the expedition. Now the baronet expeared to be a great acquisition to the gallant captain, who had an eye to the main chance, and was glad to see rich men enrol themselves under his banner.

The position of Sir Robert as a man all but utterly ruined, was not generally known, and he was still regarded as an extremely wealthy man.

The baronet made his way to the long room, where the company was already assembled, and after a haughty, supercilious bow, took his seat at the table.

Shortly afterwards the president opened the business of the evening,—

“ Gentlemen and fellow companions,” he said, “ we are here to complete the business which the sudden interruption by the appearance of the lady who came on business to Mr. Roland Dane inter-

rupted. To-night the final balloting is to take place, and then we can at once proceed to discuss as to what we shall do. The whole world is before us—all we have to do is to decide on our course of action. Now to business. The names of the gentlemen who propose themselves are all written on little slips of paper in a hat. As each one's name is drawn he will rise and state his reasons and qualifications for wishing to be a member of this brotherhood—for a brotherhood I trust I may call it."

Thereupon Captain O'Rourke drew a name from the hat. "Mr. Theobald Thompson," cried O'Rourke, reading the name from the first slip.

That gentleman, a good-looking, bright-eyed, fresh-coloured young man, of perhaps five or six and twenty, rose and spoke.

"Captain, President, and Gentlemen,—I have very little to say—I want to see sport and excitement—I'm tired of country life—tired of fox-hunting. If it was not for the chance of getting one's neck broke there'd be no fun in it at all ; there isn't much glory in running down a poor, sneaking, hunted vermin with twenty couple of hounds. No, I want to go in for better sport and bigger game. I'm prepared with my five hundred pounds and, from what I've seen of the company, feel sure we shall get on pretty well together."

Thereupon Tally-ho Thompson sat down, his brief speech being favourably received.

"The ballot," cried the President ; and then one by one those gentlemen present advanced to the ballot-box, which stood as before on a small table to

the right of Captain O'Rourke, and dropped in their ballots.

This occupied about ten minutes, and when it was finished the ballot-box was placed before the President, who proceeded to open it, declare the result, and expose it to public gaze, so that there could be no mistake on the point.

“The honourable gentleman is accepted unanimously,” the President began,—“stay a bit—no—there is one black ball.” This was a matter of some surprise, as Tally-ho Thompson was a favourite among them, and no one supposed that he would have even one black ball. “However, gentlemen, it is of no consequence,” O'Rourke went on, “as it requires two black balls to exclude. Mr. Theobald Thompson, you can take your seat on my right hand as a duly elected member.”

The next whose name was drawn was Mr. Dionysius Thorold, M.A., Cambridge. He briefly stated his reasons for wishing to make one of the Twenty. He was a learned man but by no means a milksop. He was engaged in a work partly of natural history, partly philosophical. He had some ideas of his own on the gradations and varieties of species and wished to obtain specimens of the animals, birds, &c., of foreign climes, for the double purpose of rendering his natural history a complete and valuable standard work, and also to advance his own particular ideas as to the origin and development of species.

This gentleman when balloted for was also accepted, but, strange to say, also with one black ball against him.

The next who had to describe his qualifications and reasons was Colonel Slack. He had been for many years a buffalo hunter on the vast plains of Texas, and had been for some time thinking of going back to the old hunting grounds of the Lone Star state.

“The very thing, by thunder! I said to myself,” he explained, “when I read this here advertisement; I’m in among that lot. Tired o’ buffalo—never saw an elephant or a tiger in my life, let alone had a shot at the varmints. Reckon it’ll be good sport; so, gentlemen all, if you’re agreeable, I’ll make one of this little party.”

The next whose name was drawn was Jonathan Johnson, a quiet, peculiar, middle-aged man.

“What I’ve got to say is soon said. I reckon myself a crack shot with either rifle or fowling-piece. Now there’s no game in England worth killing. I should like better sport; and shouldn’t mind the royal old game, the sport of kings: I mean I’d like to be where there was fighting going on, and shoot men.”

This somewhat blood-thirsty speech was not received seriously; Jonathan Johnson was considered an eccentric character, and it was not thought that the latter part of what he said was really meant, and there was some laughter at the quiet way in which he said he should like to shoot at men.

He, too, was balloted for, and admitted; though, also, with one black ball.

Now came Jack Rutter, known as the cannibal.
His speech was short, and to the purpose.

"I mean to make one of this crew," he said, "because I want to go for a cruise: tired of knocking about along shore. I've been for twenty years a man—a sailor—gold digger, and have lived fourteen years among the savages of the Polynesian Islands. I reckon I oughter go half-price, considering my experience that way."

He, too, was admitted, though with the inevitable one black ball.

People now began to wonder and ask whoever it could be that thus black balled every candidate; for it was generally believed that it was the work of one and the same person.

Thomas Steele, of Buscot, Berks, farmer, took his turn, and briefly explained that he wished to join, because he was tired of a lazy country life, and as he was known among the fraternity as a thorough good fellow, was at once admitted, though, as the others, with one black ball.

Dr. Columba, a Scotch surgeon, explained his reasons and qualifications slowly, cautiously, and with great care.

"Gentlemen, and Mr. Captain President, I'm a doctor—Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, London, and M.D. of Edinburgh. Now it struck me that a surgeon would come very useful to you—be almost necessary, in fact—so I thought I'd come and see if we could come to terms. You see, by reason of my special knowledge, I can be of great use; may be the means of saving some of your lives. The labourer, gentlemen, is worthy of his hire, therefore I maintain that an allowance should be made to me

for my professional services, the amount to be fixed by arbitration."

The President here rose.

"Gentlemen, you have heard the proposal of Dr. Columba: it is a matter for the consideration of the committee, after he shall have been admitted a member. The ballot will now proceed."

Dr. Columba was duly balloted for, and admitted, with, however, the now usual black ball.

The circumstance now began to be seriously talked about.

Who could it be that thus persistently black-balled everyone? But as secrecy is the very essence of the ballot, it was quite impossible to tell, although the mystery was somewhat increased by several solemnly declaring that they had black-balled no one.

Mr. Sextus Miller, F.R.G.S., also made a brief speech when called upon, in which he explained his reasons for wishing to go. His motive was of a scientific nature—certain observations of Jupiter's satellites from the southern hemisphere, and also researches concerning the parallax of the fixed stars which could only be carried out by accurate observation from different parts of the globe. It was in the hope of attaining these that, after mature consideration, he resolved to offer himself. He was a profound astronomer and mathematician, and thought with reason that his scientific knowledge might be of use in navigating the vessel.

He himself did not put in any claim to exemption, but the President, hearing his special qualifications, made a note of it, to be referred to the committee.

He was balloted for, and, with the exception of the one black ball, unanimously accepted.

Captain Carrambole was the next called upon ; and he proceeded to explain his reasons in a somewhat supercilious tone and manner.

“ Fact is,” he said, “ I’ve nothing better to do, and thought I might as well see a little life as not : that’s all I’ve got to say, gentlemen.”

Captain Carrambole, about whom very little was known, was not black-balled any more than usual, that is to say by the inevitable one.

The meeting now began to get rather noisy, and, as some important results are to follow, we will postpone till next chapter.



CHAPTER XI

SIR ROBERT BARCLAY RECEIVES A SUDDEN MESSAGE.
ON THE TRACK. THE SPECIAL TRAIN.

The ceremony of inducting the Neophytes into the companionship of the Twenty Captains was carried on with the utmost solemnity and seriousness; and any one who did not know the nature of the business would never have imagined that all this was in relation to so mad-brained an enterprise.

Roland Dane sat, as before, near the bottom of the table, with Jacob Knox on his right hand.

There was a hectic flush on the usual pale cheeks of the Lancashire lad; his eyes glittered with excitement, and he evidently awaited with nervous anxiety for his own turn to come, to speak and explain himself.

“Cheer up!” said Roland Dane, encouragingly, “you’ll pull through all right.”

“I hope so; but I tremble at my own presumption. Think of the shame and disgrace if what I have to say is received with laughter and scorn.”

“There is no fear of that. It will be all right.”

“Mr. Roland Dane,” said the President at this moment, reading them the slip he held in his hand.

Roland rose and spoke:—

"Captain President and Gentlemen,—I am exceedingly anxious to make one of this adventurous party, and trust we shall all receive profit, sport, and excitement during our cruise, wherever it may be. I wish for sport, tired as I am of a quiet, monotonous life. That is my reason. As for my qualification, I have not much to say. I am ready with my share towards the capital needed, and beyond that, can only boast of a good constitution, good faith, and good courage. In conclusion, whether you accept me or not, I beg most earnestly to recommend to your favourable consideration my friend on the right, Jacob Knox, for whom I have the highest regard and esteem."

Roland Dane was a general favourite among the companions, and there was little fear of his being black-balled, or his ends respecting Jacob not having due weight.

Still, however, it was a ticklish 'thing which the Lancashire lad had to propose, namely, that he should be admitted among them without payment of the five hundred pounds, one hundred being the utmost he could manage. This sum Roland Dane had forced him to accept as a loan.

He did not propose to be admitted on an equality with the other gentlemen, his modesty shrinking from what he considered would be a piece of audacity. He wished to join the expedition not as one of the Twenty Captains, but as a subaltern, even as a private if necessary, and atone by taking a greater share of hardship and work, for his money deficiency.

Roland Dane was balloted for and accepted, but with one black ball against him, as had been the case with all who came before him.

When first he arose and spoke, a gentleman sitting opposite started, looked hard at him, as though he recognized the voice.

It would seem, however, that this person could not also recognize the features of our friend, for an expression of puzzled doubt settled on his face, and he turned his eye away as though giving it up.

This was Sir Robert Barclay, whom the Lady Maude held in such horror and dread, one of the two men with whom Roland and Jacob had had the conflict in St. James's Park.

Presently the name of Sir Robert Barclay was called, and he rose to respond.

He had allowed his name to be entered, although he had not made up his mind definitely to join. All depended on the issue of that final attempt on Lady Maude, as to the success of which he observed he did not feel over sanguine.

He by no means intended to pay the five hundred pounds, however, until he had fully made up his mind, and did not doubt that he could postpone that until such time as he had, especially as the President and Captain O'Rourke had great faith in him, by reason of his being a baronet and of reputed wealth.

So Sir Robert Barclay, with the usual expression of supercilious scorn on his face, rose and in an off-hand manner began speaking in a tone of careless indifference, as though the whole thing, President, company, and all, were only a matter of ridicule.

At his first words, Roland Dane, who had been looking another way, turned his head sharply and stared him hard in the face.

Jacob Knox, too, looked earnestly at him.

And just at this moment there came another interruption.

A waiter entered hastily with a note in his hand.

“Is Sir Robert Barclay here?”

“That is my name,” the baronet replied.

A note, marked immediate. “The bearer, a commissionnaire, drove up in a handsome cab, and said, ‘It is to be delivered to Sir Robert instantly.’”

Sir Robert took it, tore it open, and having read it, crumpled it up in his hand, and said abruptly—

“I must be going—important business calls me away. Don’t let my absence interfere with your tomfoolery, I beg.”

The words were not courteous, nor was his manner. It was obvious, however, that the contents of the letter had greatly excited him; for his eyes shone like live coals and his dark face was flushed.

The President, however, was disposed to look favourably upon him, and proposed that as Sir Robert had been suddenly called away on what was obviously business of great importance, he should be balloted for as though he were present.

No objection was made to this, for, although Roland Dane and Jacob looked on him with suspicion and instinctive dislike, neither they nor anyone else knew anything whatever against him.

The letter which had caused the sudden departure of Sir Robert was as follow:—

“ VICTORIA STATION, 10.30 P.M.

“She's off, made a sudden bolt and drove with Ellen Carmichael in a cab to Victoria Station. I followed with others, and one of my spies heard them ask for a train to Dover. They had made some mistake as to time, for the last train had gone; or else they originally intended to order a special train—which Ellen Carmichael did. It will be ready in an hour, price to be charged one hundred pounds. They are in one of the waiting rooms. Ellen seems very impatient, Maude nervous and excited. I don't think they have seen me, or know that they are followed, for I was very cautious. One of Mrs. Wyndham's footmen is with them—to see them off, I suppose. Come on here at once—main line side. If you think it is worth risking we can make the attempt at once, as John Carmichael is with me and has the warrant. In haste.

“Yours, &c.

“ALGERNON.”

“Of course it's not worth risking,” muttered Sir Robert, as he jumped into a hansom, bidding the man drive him to Victoria Station, “the d——d fool ought to know that it can't be done in London. Help is too near at hand, and that cursed girl with her is quick and determined. It must be done in the country. She must be followed to Dover. By—I'll have her this time, I do believe.”

Urged on by the promise of double pay, the cab rattled over the stones, through the mall of St. James's Park, where the adventure which commenced

the story happened, and dashed up to Victoria Station.

Sir Robert leaped out, tossed the man half-a-sovereign, and not waiting for change, entered the nearest door of the station.

His haste outran his discretion, for scarcely had he gone half-a-dozen yards towards the platform, than a female figure came out of a room on the left, and he found himself face to face with Ellen Carmichael.

He was excited, and this sudden and unexpected meeting quite disconcerted him.

Then it flashed across his mind that he might make it appear that it was an accident brought him there, but the suddenness of the encounter had so flurried him as to have little hope of his deceiving the acute observations of the Scottish girl. "Ah! Ellen—I beg pardon, Miss Carmichael I mean—Who'd have thought of seeing you here?"

She curtseyed with mock respect, and replied—

"Who would have thought of seeing Sir Robert Barclay here at this hour? The business which calls him here is, I presume, very important."

Ellen could, when she chose, speak with the most cutting sarcasm, though withal so quietly.

"Oh! no—no particular business—only I'm going a little way down the line."

"The last train has gone long ago, Sir Robert," she said with a mocking smile.

"By Jove, what a nuisance. I've wasted my journey here, and paid eighteen pence for a cab in coming here."

"I regret to hear that the fortunes of Sir Robert Barclay are so desperate, that the loss of one shilling and sixpence could cause him such trouble as appears in his face and manner. I am only a poor girl, Sir Robert (taking out her purse); but if you will allow me to reimburse you the one and—"

"You be d——d," shouted Sir Robert, fairly driven furious by the girl's quiet insolence. He hurried away without another word, having got much the worst of the encounter, and being goaded into losing his temper.

Ellen Carmichael had so far gained a complete victory. With woman's quick perception, she knew at once that he had come there in pursuit of Lady Maude, and thought that to put him into a passion would be the best way to make him show his cards, and cause him to act rashly, foolishly, and thus perhaps defeat himself.

She entered the waiting-room, where she had just left Lady Maude, in order to make some inquiries as to how long the train ordered would be.

The persecuted young lady at once saw by the pale, anxious face of her humble friend that something had happened.

"What is the matter, Ellen! For heaven's sake tell me what has occurred."

"Do not be alarmed; nothing serious, I hope."

"But what—ah! I know we are followed."

"Calm yourself, Lady Maude: we want all our courage now. We must have our wits about us. He is here. He must have caused us to be watched and followed,"

“Who—not Sir Robert Barclay?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! great heavens; then all is lost. What shall I do? Save me Ellen,—save me.”

Lady Maude now began to weep.

“Pray do not give way, or I can do nothing. If you will only be calm and courageous, I will save you; help you to save yourself.”

Soon the frightened girl in some sort recovered her self-possession and felt ashamed of her former weakness.

“Yes, I will be brave, Ellen. I will struggle against the foolish panic terror. You can trust me: I will not betray such weakness again. You need not be afraid to leave me, if it is necessary.”

“I will call Mrs. Wyndham’s servant, James, and tell him to wait outside the door. I don’t think they dare attempt anything here. It is best that I try and discover what it is he intends to do.”

Ellen went out, leaving Lady Maude pacing up and down the waiting-room—pale, but calm and collected now.

At every sound, however, her frightened gaze sought the door, and she looked eagerly for the return of Ellen.

The railway superintendent who had given orders for a special train to be prepared was considerably astonished by an application for another one. Algernon, whom Sir Robert at once sought out, and told of his encounter with Ellen, strongly advised him not to make application for a train until that prepared for Lady Maude had been despatched,

But he would not listen to it. His anger had caused him to completely lose his prudence, and nothing could deter him from going to the superintendent at once.

Under these circumstances Algernon went with him, though in great doubt as to the result.

“Why, gentlemen, this is very strange. It is only an hour ago or so that a special train was ordered by two ladies.”

“Oh, indeed! But that’s got nothing to do with us. We want one in the course of an hour, or at all events as soon as possible. We must catch the Calais boat, which leaves early in the morning, and there being no other train, we must have a special, that’s all about it.”

“But don’t you think you could arrange with the two ladies to have a carriage attached to their train? It could do no harm—good, indeed, as it would have the effect of steadyng it.”

This proposal was striking, and pleased Sir Robert, who would have been delighted thus to outwit the two, and be revenged on Ellen. He drew on one side, and consulted with Lord Algernon.

“They would never consent if they knew it,” the latter remarked. “Maude would not at all, if she suspected such a thing. Of that I’m quite sure. It’s madness to think of it. But could it not be done without their knowledge?”

“I don’t think so—the station-master would not consent. We can try.”

They did so, and the result proved that they were right.

“No, we could not think of doing that. These ladies pay for this train, and no one else can travel by it without their consent.”

“But we’ll pay over and above——”

“No—it is irregular,” was the firm reply. “If you can get their consent, well and good, or if you like, I will ask them.”

No, we do not wish that. Well, then, get us another train to follow theirs as soon as possible. What charge shall you make?”

“Our charge for a special to Dover is a hundred pounds, but——”

“I’ll give you a hundred and twenty.”

The railway official was in doubt whether to grant a second special or not at all, so strange and mysterious did the whole thing appear. He had a suspicion that all was not quite right.

But then he had his employers—the company—to look to. What would they say to his refusing a hundred and twenty pounds? They might blame him. He reflected that railway companies were not usually very particular, granting specials for prize-fights without any trouble.

So he finally decided to accept the offered hundred and twenty pounds and provide the train.

“It’s a pity, though, you couldn’t arrange it with the ladies though,” he said; “as it is preparing this second train will delay both. We can’t get steam up on two engines, provide them with coal and water, fireman and stoker, and telegraph to all the stations to keep the line clear—in a minute or so.”

“Well, it can’t be helped,” said Sir Robert. “Get

our train as soon as possible after the first. I've somewhere to go now; but will be back in about an hour. My name is Sir Robert Barclay, and that I suppose is a sufficient guarantee that I'm in earnest."

"Very well, Sir Robert," said the station-master, "the train shall be got ready as soon as possible."

Lord Algernon called him on one side—

"I believe Ellen Carmichael's on the look out for us. It will never do to let her know that we've engaged a train to follow them. Ask the station master not to mention it. Tell him if he does that you'll countermand the train, and then there'll be a dead loss to the company of sixty or seventy pounds at least, most probably."

"Look here, sir," said Sir Robert, taking up the cue; "it is desirable that the ladies who have engaged the first train should be in ignorance that we have ordered one likewise."

"I shall not go out of my way to tell them, and I don't suppose they'll ask me."

"Ah!" put in Lord Algernon, "but it is quite possible they may ask you. I should not tell a falsehood about it. At all events you can refuse to answer at all. Indeed, I feel pretty sure that if they knew for certain that we had a second train they would decline to go, and as, under those circumstances, we should certainly do the same, the company would lose the price of both trains."

"Well, I can safely say that I shall not answer any questions at all."

"That will do. Come along, Sir Robert," said Lord Algernon, taking his arm,

When they were outside the station-master's office the latter whispered hurriedly:

"I think Ellen Carmichael is watching us. Let's hail a cab, and try and put her on a wrong scent. How long will it take you to drive us to the Great Western Railway Station?" cried Lord Algernon, in a loud voice.

"A little more than half-an-hour, sir."

"Well, drive like blazes, we want to catch a train."

As he had surmised, Ellen Carmichael, who stood in the shadow of the portico at a little distance, heard the words, and saw them get into the cab and drive off.

But she by no means fell blindly into the error of believing that they had indeed gone.

She stood for some moments in deep thought, and then slowly made her way to the superintendent's office. He fidgetted nervously as she entered, guessing that she was going to ask him that which he had said he would not tell.

"Your train, madam, is being prepared, and will be ready to start in, say, three-quarters of an hour from this, or perhaps an hour."

"Thank you, sir—thanks. I was about to ask you if there way any possible means of reaching Dover before morning, after we have left? I mean to say, could anyone who started from here after us arrive in Dover by seven o'clock in the morning?"

"There is no passenger train to-night, my dear madam, now, I assure you, so I don't see how anyone can get down, except by your train, or another special."

"That is what I want to know. Will there be any other special start to-night?"

"My dear madam," replied the superintendent, coughing, and looking dignified, "mine is a position of great responsibility. I have no more right to inform you of any of the business affairs of this company than I have to show you the books. I must decline to answer any such questions. Really, though," he added, smiling, "you seem to think special trains are as thick as blackberries on a hedge."

"I assure you you are mistaken."

Ellen said no more, seeing that it would be useless, and returned to Lady Maude, who was awaiting her with feverish impatience.

"I believe," she said, in explanation of what had occurred since her absence, "that Sir Robert and your brother have seen the superintendent or station-master. I saw them coming from his office."

"If they did see him, then they know that we are going by special train," said Maude.

"Yes, certainly."

"But they cannot stop us, surely?"

"I don't think they will attempt to do so. I think they will let us get away from London."

The Lady Maude's face brightened, and she cried joyfully:

"Ah! I am so glad to hear you say that. If only I can once get to Dover, then in a few hours we should be on board the steamer—across the channel—safe on the shores of 'la belle France.'"

But Ellen still looked sad and doubtful, and the other noticed it.

“What is the matter, Ellen? You don’t seem delighted at the thought of our escape—you anticipate some misfortune?”

“I was thinking, Lady Maude, that though they may not attempt to molest you in London—may allow you to leave—that they may follow you.”

“But we go by special train, Ellen, and to-morrow morning the boat starts. We shall be safely across the channel before they arrive.”

“But I was thinking,” said Ellen, in a tone by no means reassuring, “that they also might take a special train. I tried to ascertain if such was the case from the superintendent; but could get no satisfaction.”

“And where are they now, these men? Sir Robert and my brother—no—no, I did not mean to say that—I have no brother—I hate the name. I will never say that word again if I can help it.”

She grew quite angry at the thought of the wicked treachery of so near a relation, more angry at the thought of that than at the relentless and cruel persecution of Sir Robert Barclay.

“They got into a cab, and told the driver to take them to Paddington, and to drive fast, for they wished to catch a train. I do not know for certain whether it was a blind or not, but I strongly suspect so. They may come back here and follow us in another train.”

“We will be on our guard, Ellen, and we will watch keenly; and if once they let us get off safe I can bribe the engine-driver to go fast—sixty, seventy, a hundred miles an hour! Oh! if we can only get to

Dover I feel I shall be safe. You know, Ellen, I fear the law is on his side."

"If he were certain such were the case," she replied, "you would not have been suffered to remain unmolested for the last week when he knew to a certainty where you were. No, Lady Maude, I feel positive he is not secure enough to appeal to the law in London. And yet," she said, hesitating, "I don't know what to think. From what I overheard the other day pass between Lord Algernon and John I gathered that they meant to enlist the law in their favour, though in some underhand manner."

"Whatever may be their intentions," cried Lady Maude, "my course is clear. Whether they purpose to seize me legally or illegally, it is none the less an atrocious and cruel outrage they contemplate, and I must escape. Oh! that I had the wings of a bird, and could fly away. We must place the sea between us, Ellen—the deep sea—a barrier against unjust and cruel laws; if indeed, as they say, they have the law on their side. Oh! I love the sea! the sea is not treacherous, nor false, as I've heard; the sea between France and England shall be my protection and safeguard. Come, Ellen, let us fly at once."

She grasped her companion tightly by the arm, and her eyes flashing, a bright flush on her cheeks, sought to lead her towards the door.

Ellen Carmichael saw and noted with sorrow the excited state, and listened to the incoherent language of the persecuted heiress, with a feeling approaching terror. She feared that constant terror and anxiety might so play upon the poor girl's mind as even to

affect her reason. Even now she spoke in a strange, impetuous, delirious manner, quite unusual with her. Ellen saw that, worn out by this constant and unrelenting persecution, what remaining fortitude she had would shortly break down. She herself, more strong indeed, less timid and gentle, and not having been exposed to the same long series of troubles and perils, could keep up her heart and endeavour to inspire the weaker with some of her own courage and energy ; but she felt there was a limit even to the assistance she could render. The brave heart and strong arm of a man were wanted to carry Lady Maude safely through this peril ; and Ellen Carmichael, resolute as she was, felt this.

The thought did not exactly shape itself in words, but it was present ; and then there came to her mind what the young lady had said about there being one who, she felt sure, would render her willing and efficient aid.

“Lady Maude, listen to me. I feel—I know that our peril—your peril—is imminent. I am ignorant as to what are the intentions of those wicked men ; but I know they are desperate—at least, Sir Robert is. If ever a man looked like a demon, he did when I enraged him ; and though I did not own it, I felt positively terrified. Woman’s wit will go a long way in defeating man’s villainy ; but it requires the strength and courage of a man, at the last resort, to fight against a determined and reckless villain. You said you had one friend who, at the last resort, would come to your aid. The time has come ; send at once—instantly !”

"Is it indeed necessary?" asked Maude, hesitatingly.

"It is indeed necessary. We are lost without help. I do not despair; but I begin to doubt. Those men are terrible; the one crafty as a fox, the other fierce and merciless as a tiger; and, worst of all, we do not know their plans. Send to the gentleman of whom you spoke—at once—instantly, lose not a moment, or we are lost."

"But I shall have to write a letter," pleaded Maude, still hanging back, and loth to ask for aid from Roland Dane.

"Then write it now, with me, at the station-master's office. I assure you I am right—I am certain I am right. Come, there is a dear, good lady!"

Thus urged, Lady Maude yielded; and in a quarter of an hour a note was despatched by James, Mrs. Wyndham's footman.

The note contained an enclosure—the promised portrait of herself.

This done, the two girls—the wealthy heiress and her humble friend—anxiously awaited its effect, and the special train which was to bear them away.

CHAPTER XII.

JACOB KNOX RELATES HIS STORY. A DEED OF
HEROISM.

THE business which Sir Robert Barclay had so irreverently and not over-courteously called “tomfoolery,” was carried on in the long room at the Cavendish Hotel with a good deal of solemnity, interrupted at times, however, by laughter and bursts of applause.

Sextus Miller, Dionysius Thorold, M.A. Cambridge, Sam Dansou, a Yorkshire horse-dealer, Samson Slamm, the burly blacksmith, and others, were duly balloted for and elected members of the Twenty.

It was noticed, however, that the one black ball which had characterized all the earlier elections was now absent ; and as it ceased to appear immediately after the departure of Sir Robert Barclay, the suggestion was natural and unavoidable that it was he who had so persistently blackballed everybody. This, indeed, was the truth ; and the fact was in keeping with Sir Robert’s cynical nature.

The process of electing the members was somewhat slow; as in the first place a candidate’s name had to be drawn from the hat, and read out by the President; then the person so named had to rise and make a

brief speech ; and lastly came the process of balloting, each one advancing singly to the box.

After this, there was the declaration of the result by the Captain President ; and then a large cross having been placed on the slate opposite the successful name by the huge Irishman who officiated as secretary, Captain O'Rourke proceeded to propose the health of, as he expressed it, "their new brother and future companion in arms and sports."

In order to do honour to the toast, each glass was replenished from the steaming bowl at the head of the table.

All this, of course, occupied some considerable time ; and it is also not surprising that, what with the potent punch and excitement combined, these boon companions should gradually become more noisy, and the assemblage, from being one of a purely formal and business character, gradually assumed more that of a carouse.

Flushed faces and glittering eyes told the tale that blood was warming and hearts beating faster.

As it happened, Jacob Knox's name was not drawn until near the last ; and when it came to his turn, the young man's pale, earnest face, and attenuated, gaunt frame contrasted strangely with those around him.

" Captain President and gentlemen,—I have but little to say, and beg your kind indulgence for my presumption."

He paused a moment or two, coughed slightly, and wiped his mouth with his handkerchief. None saw the crimson froth he thus removed ; but there was

a something in his manner and appearance to compel attention. Hushed was the noisy jest and laugh, the rattle of glasses and spoons; and a dead silence prevailed, as, with all eyes fixed on him, the Lancashire lad proceeded—

“I am most anxious to reside among you, honourable gentlemen. I do not presume to be admitted on terms of equality, as I am neither fitted for it by birth or education. My means are limited, as I have but a hundred and ten pounds in the world, kindly lent me by a friend. This, of course, is at your service; and should you deign to accept it in lieu of the whole five hundred, I would endeavour, by accepting a subordinate position, by bearing a greater share of hardship and fatigue, by living harder, working harder, and in every other possible way to atone for my shortcoming in moneys.”

Jacob Knox sat down, and Roland Dane, who looked disappointed, spoke to him rapidly in an undertone.

He seemed to be urging him to something which Jacob was loth to do, for he shook his head again and again.

The silence with which Jacob Knox’s speech had been received lasted for some little time afterwards.

Then there arose a low murmuring as the singular proposal of Jacob was discussed.

After a bit the president rose and spoke:—

“Gentlemen and brothers in arms” (this was O’Rourke’s favourite phrase; it gave a tone of chivalrous romance to the affair, he thought), “you

have heard the speech and proposal of Mr. Jacob Knox—a proposal which, I must say, is a strange one. I do not observe that the honourable gentleman claims any special qualification for a remission of four-fifths of the sum fixed on. However, I will leave it to you. If you think fit, the honourable gentleman shall be balloted for, and then the question of remission referred to the committee which will be appointed to arrange all the money matters of the association."

The murmured conversation grew louder, and Roland Dane, anxiously listening, thought that its tenor was unfavourable to his friend and protégé. So again whispering quickly to Jacob, he rose and spoke :—

"Captain President and gentlemen, I beg most earnestly to second the proposal of my friend Mr. Jacob Knox. Moreover I will myself subscribe another hundred pounds towards this fund, in order to help make up the deficiency, if he should be accepted. Moreover, gentlemen, my friend has a few more words to say: he is over bashful, and requires urging on to speak for himself of himself. Gentlemen, he will now relate an episode of his life, and tell you more particularly his reasons for wishing to be one of us. As for his qualification, gentlemen, I consider he has that on his breast."

These last words of Roland Dane were not understood by the company, and it was thought that he had been imperfectly heard.

Jacob Knox now rose, and spoke falteringly and with obvious reluctance:—

“Captain President and gentlemen, I have been urged by my good friend Mr. Roland Dane to say more about myself than I should otherwise have ventured to have done. One reason for my wishing to join this expedition, apart from a love of adventure and a desire to see more of foreign lands, is that able physicians tell me that my only hope of being restored to perfect health is by change of climate. I am suffering from the effect of bullet wounds received in the Crimea.”

“Tell them how you got the wounds, Jacob. Speak out, man—don’t be afraid,” said Roland Dane.

The faint flush on Jacob’s usually pale cheek deepened, and his eyes seemed to fire up with the memory of the past.

“I will,” he said, and went on.

“Captain President and gentlemen, I was but a drummer-boy in an English regiment before Sebastopol. One foggy November morning, a few days before the desperate fight of Inkermann, a sortie was made from the trenches by our regiment, and another to drive the Russians from the rifle-pit they had made dangerously close to our works, and also to destroy some small redoubts of sand-bags and palisades they had thrown up in our front, and which seriously annoyed us. There was a hard hand-to-hand fight, but finally our brave soldiers drove them from the rifle-pits and destroyed their works, from which also they expelled them with the bayonet.

“But the Russians shortly after brought up heavy reinforcements, and a retreat to the trenches became necessary. Our soldiers, however, with true British

obstinacy, would only give way inch by inch, fighting stubbornly the while. The consequence was that many a brave fellow fell by the Russian bullets. The wounded, and even the killed, however, were for the most part carried away by their comrades as they retreated before the heavy Russian columns. When our troops got behind the earthworks they were ordered to another part of the trenches threatened with an attack, and I and some of the wounded, with the surgeons and attendants, were left at the place whence the sortie took place. Peering over the earthworks, as lads will do from sheer curiosity, to observe the enemy and watch the puffs of white smoke as a desultory fire ran along our front, I saw two mounted officers of my regiment lying about a hundred yards in front of our works, and exposed to the enemy's rifle fire. They were waving their silk sashes for help, and I watched one of them stagger to his feet, and endeavour to raise his brother officer, who seemed more seriously wounded. In this he failed, and falling again, they once more lay side by side.

"I could see the dirt and stones thrown up every now and again, as a bullet from the Russian rifle-pit struck close to them. If they lay there much longer they must both be killed; that was certainty.

"My heart bled for them, and I resolved to attempt to save them. It was a damp, cold, miserable morning—dismal, dark, and foggy—the precursor of many such mornings which our poor fellows had to spend in the trenches. There were very few just at

this part; for, as I have said, the troops were hurried to one of the salients, where two mortars were posted which the enemy threatened. In the trench just below were I clambered on the earthwork, were eight or ten soldiers mortally or badly wounded, and twenty more, perhaps less seriously hurt. The surgeons, and a few convalescents from hospital, were doing their best for these; and with the exception of a sentry there were no others. So I had the look-out from the earthwork to myself. My eyes, however, were not directed to the line of white smoke about a quarter of a mile on the right marking the Russian advance, nor to the puffs constantly issuing from the deadly rifle-pits, but to the two wounded officers. One of them—Captain Cameron, of the 2nd company—had been very kind to me, and the memory of this made me all the more determined to try and save him. I could not bear to look at him lying helpless, wounded, perhaps bleeding to death, with bullets spattering all around him, waving his sash for help, and do nothing. So, without further thought, I clambered over the damp loose earth, slid down, and found myself in the open space between the works of the English and Russians. I ran as fast as I could, and was soon by the side of the wounded men. Then I saw that the other one was the major of the regiment—Hoskyns by name. He had been a bitter enemy to me. Once he had sent me to his tent to fetch his sword and belt, and shortly afterwards his watch which was hanging up there was stolen. He accused me of it, and called me a thief. The real thief was discovered in a few days, and I

was proved innocent. Some time after that he ordered me to go to his tent again and I refused. He said he would have me flogged for mutinous conduct. I told him that I would rather be flogged than accused of theft. Then he called me an insolent young scoundrel, and struck me. I was only a drummer-boy, gentlemen, and he was an officer, so I was forced to put up with it. I would not have minded the blow so much, for he was a passionate man; but it was this that hurt me: he never even said he was sorry for having brought a false accusation against me."

Jacob Knox paused here, and wiping the froth tinged with blood from his lips, took a few sips of water, which Roland handed to him, with some words of encouragement.

Jacob Knox was pale, save a spot of red on each cheek, but quite cool and collected. It seemed that though loath to speak, when he had once commenced, he meant to speak out fully and frankly.

During the time which elapsed between his ceasing and beginning again, a dead silence reigned, proving that the company took great interest in his simple tale.

"After that time," he resumed "Major Hoskyns was my most persistent enemy. I don't wish to do him an injustice: it was his nature. He was a bad man and good officer, but very vindictive, and to me he took a mortal hatred. He, then, and Captain Cameron, lay wounded side by side. Captain Cameron was shot in the foot, which lamed him, and also in the shoulder. He was faint from loss of blood, but not mortally wounded. Mr Hoskyns

had his thigh broken by a bullet, so that it was impossible he could walk or even crawl. He was the more seriously wounded of the two. But, of course, I did not hesitate an instant, and hastened to lift Captain Cameron to his feet. When once I got him erect, he was able, leaning on my arm, to hobble along. He turned before we set out on our journey to the trenches, towards Major Hoskyns. I too looked round, and shall not soon forget the pleading, agonized look of the wounded major.

"The Russian bullets were continually hissing through the air, or striking the ground all about and, besides, it was certain that before long, as there was no return fire from the British works at that point, that some of the Russians would soon rush from the rifle-pits, and, as was their invariable custom, murder the wounded officer for the sake of what he had about him, or even his uniform, sword, and pistol.

"'I'll send back and have you brought in if I can, Hoskyns,' said Captain Cameron, faintly. 'Goodbye, if we never meet again.'

"Major Hoskyns said not a word; but to my dying day I shall never forget the look of pleading horror in his face and eyes. I have said he was not a coward; but to lie thus—wounded, helpless—with the certainty of being butchered in cold blood by the Russian savages, it was a prospect enough to appal the bravest. I did not bid him farewell. I could not do so. Besides, this was no time for talk. Bullets were flying about, and it was necessary we got under cover as soon as possible. Accordingly,

Captain Cameron leaning on me, we made our way as best we could towards the trenches ; he limping along in pain, and leaning on me. It was only a little over a hundred yards ; but before we got to the English works, a bullet went through my arm ; and poor Captain Cameron also was hit, but not badly, and we got to the foot of the great mound of earth thrown up from the trenches. It was no easy task clambering up, but we accomplished it ; and when once on the top, before seeking safety by getting down into the trench, took a look-out. Major Hoskyns was still lying where we left him, and we could see the Russian riflemen coming out of their pits and slowly making towards him. They were about five hundred yards from our works, and a little less than four hundred from the wounded major.

“ ‘ Jacob,’ said Captain Cameron, ‘ poor Hoskyns is done for. He’ll be murdered in ten minutes. I wish to God we could have brought him in too. I reproach myself for having left him.’

“ Then I said, ‘ Captain, I’ll bring him in, or die for it.’

“ And then, without another word, I scrambled down, and ran as hard as I could back towards where I had fetched him from. Captain Cameron called to me as loudly as he was able before I had gone far, and I stopped and turned round. He was waving his revolver, and I went back a little way and he threw it to me. When I started again the Russian riflemen were then much nearer the major ; and when I got up to him they were only about two hundred yards off, and kept firing as they advanced.

Their aim was not good, however, for the reason that they did not stop to take pains, but loaded as they went on, and just, blazed away. They felt pretty certain of their booty, I think, as, by there being no fire from the British works, they knew that their were no troops there at that moment, though of course, if they had come on in numbers we should soon have had plenty to meet them.

“‘Can you walk, sir?’ I said, as I tried to lift him up.

“‘No, I can’t,’ he said, ‘my leg is broken above the knee, and I am faint.’

“‘Then get on my back, major, and I’ll try and carry you.’

“No more was said, and I dragged him up, so that he could get his arms round my neck, stooping the while. Then, when I straightened myself, he was off the ground, all except his feet, that dragged a little. He was not a heavy man—I should say barely ten stone—so I got on with him pretty well for some distance; then we heard a shout and a dozen shots, and knew that the Russians were after us like wolves fearful of losing their prey. We had sixty or seventy yards to go yet, and of course I could only get on very slowly with him on my back. Before we had gone many more yards we heard the shouts nearer, and even the tramp of their feet, as they ran on in pursuit. Looking over my shoulder, I saw that they must inevitably overtake us before we could reach shelter. They, too, knew it, for they did not stay to load their rifles, but ran on as fast as they could, shouting, or rather yelling, like demons.

And all the while not a man fired on them from our works, for the very good reason that there were none there, as there was a sharp affair going on lower down.

“ Well, gentlemen, when we got within about thirty yards of the trenches I hallooed with all my might for help. The Russians were close upon us, and in half a minute some of the first would have had their bayonets through us. I called to the major to get his revolver ready, and asked him if he was well enough to shoot. He said yes, but could not fire over his shoulder. So I halted and turned round when I judged the nearest were within twenty yards. The major saw what I meant, and clinging round my neck with one hand, fired with his right, and shot the two first Russians, neither of them having their rifles loaded. Then I scrambled on a few yards more, when whiz! whiz! came some bullets about, and I felt I was hit again. The major, too, gave a cry and a groan, and I knew he had got another wound. I was now all but dead beat, and wouldn’t make a pretence to run, so I turned round, and facing the Russians, walked backwards slowly. The major, who I said before was a brave man, never lost his nerve, but fired all the other bullets of his revolver, and shot another Russian; then I handed him the pistol Captain Cameron had thrown me, and just in time, for two fellows in the long Russian grey coats we knew so well dashed up with bayonets at the charge. They made sure of us then, as they thought the major had fired off all the barrels of his pistol, and didn’t know I had handed him another

one. But they found their mistake out, for Major Hoskyns shot away well and truly, and both these fellows went down. But there were half-a-dozen close behind them, and there were only three more barrels of the revolver undischarged. There were only about twenty yards between us and the great mound of earth once behind which we should be safe. I turned and faced the Russians, retreating slowly backwards, while the wounded officer on my back kept ready with his pistol. The Russians halted within twenty yards, and proceeded to load their rifles. Strange to say, all this time, though so close to the English trenches, not a shot was fired at them. Just as I got to this part of the embankment, still stumbling backwards as well as I could, the Russians had loaded and fired. I felt myself hit a second time, and a groan and a start from my burden told that he also was again wounded. The report of half-a-dozen rifles, however, called the attention of those in the trenches, and in a second or two several rifles were protruded and fired at the foe by the surgeons, their assistants, and two or three convalescent soldiers. And now commenced a hard part of my task—that of climbing up the embankment, loaded as I was. Just as I reached the top I slipped, and in struggling turned my face to the enemy. The wounded major was seized, and dragged into safety, but I slid to the bottom of the embankment, and just as I staggered to my feet, and was about to commence the task of climbing up again, I felt myself shot in the chest, and fell to the ground. Two brave soldiers, however, who had been attracted by

the firing, came down to my assistance, and, heedless of the fire of the Russians, carried me safely into the trenches. The last bullet which struck me penetrated the lung, and it is from that injury that I am now suffering. The physicians say that a change of climate and giving up sedentary occupation will certainly restore me to health. That, gentlemen, is, as I said before, partly my reason for wishing to be one of this expedition. I have no qualification beyond willingness to face danger and endure hardship, and the fact—if, indeed, as my friend Mr. Dane thinks, it is any recommendation—that I have won and wear the Victoria Cross."

With the last words the Lancashire lad threw open his coat, and there was seen glittering on his breast the plain bronze cross, with the plain inscription "For Valour." There was a silence of a few seconds; then, as if by one accord, the whole company rose, and a great shout of applause rang out—a deafening, ringing cheer, which told that the simple story of Jacob Knox had not failed in effect.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN TALBOT CHALLENGES HECTOR M'NAB.

THERE was not a dissentient voice to mar the shout of applause which greeted the last words of Jacob Knox.

“To the ballot! to the ballot!” was the cry when the uproar and confusion had somewhat subsided.

“Ay, the ballot! the ballot!” shouted another; “he shall be one of us.”

These and other excited cries for a time prevented anything serious being done.

Jacob Knox reseated himself, and leaned his face on his arm, overcome by emotion, while Roland Dane, pressing his hand, said, “There, old fellow, I told you how it would be. I knew they couldn’t hear what you told me and be unmoved.”

“Thanks, kind friend, thanks,” said Jacob, in thick utterance. “I never thought I had the boldness to say so much about myself until I began.”

Order being a little restored, the President stood up, and spoke in a loud voice:—

“Gentlemen all, if I understand the feeling of the assembly aright, it is that Mr. Jacob Knox be at once ballcted for.”

“Yes! yes! yes!” resounded on all hands.

“To the ballot, gentlemen, to the ballot ; and bad luck to the man that throws in a black ball, say I, Captain O’Rourke, of Ballysmashem Castle, Ireland,” the President added, forgetting his official capacity in his enthusiasm for the pale young man, who had just told such a pathetic tale of heroism.

“Bad luck, indeed!” shouted the stalwart Scotchman Hector M’Ivor M’Gregor M’Nab, leaping on the table in a state of wild excitement. “By the bagpipes of Scotland—by the soul of my great ancestor Rob Roy M’Gregor, I’m the strongest man in the room, and I’ll throw any man out o’ the window that blackballs yon brave lad.”

“Calm yourself, my dear sir, calm yourself,” said a voice by his side ; “always be calm. You’re not the strongest man in the room. And as for Rob Roy M’Gregor, he was only a robber and outlaw.”

Hector M’Nab leaped down and confronted the speaker, Mr. John Talbot, before spoken of, who certainly was as big a man, and to all appearance might be as strong. The excited Scotchman, measuring the form of this Englishman with his eye, observing the broad chest, the big limbs, and general build of the man, thought it quite possible that his boast of being the strongest man in the room might be difficult to sustain—albeit he was very powerful—all bone and sinew.

“I say I am the strongest man in the room,” he shouted again, furiously, determined not to give in ; and whoever dares say that Rob Roy M’Gregor—that glorious Highland chieftain—was a robber and an outlaw, by the bagpipes of Scotland, I’ll—I’ll—

I'll fight him, and smash him into bits no bigger than pebblestones."

This threat of the excited Scotchman was certainly of a terrible nature, but did not seem to discompose John Talbot in the least.

"Calm yourself, my good friend, calm yourself; always be calm. As for fighting, I don't like it; but I must say I object to being smashed into little bits. As for Rob Roy M'Gregor, I don't care what you choose to call him—an archbishop, royal duke, anything you like. But what concerns me is that you're not the strongest man in the room, and I am open to prove it at a proper season."

"Now, now, Sassenach!" shouted Hector M'Nab, stamping furiously on the ground, ready to dance with excitement.

"Yes, I'm a Sassenach, as you call it, no doubt, but I'm a big Sassenach, and a stronger Sassenach than you are, any day. My good friend, before you talk to me, you must eat more haggis and cock-a-leekie."

John Talbot's one particular weakness was his bodily strength, a strange contradiction apparently in terms but nevertheless the truth. For any one to assert his superiority in that respect he at once took as a challenge, and on such occasions would say harder words than those knowing his quiet, easy nature would ever have given him credit for. Hector M'Nab, always a fire-eater, and though brave as steel, a bit of a braggart, at this grew frantic, and now his Scotch accent burst out.

"Wha talks to me o' cock-a-leekie, may the de'il

fly awa' wi' ye, ye Saxon loonie—but I'm a better man than ever your mither bare—eh! but let's put it to the ordeal o' battle—Hoch! awa' now, all o' ye, and see how I'll o'erthrow this southern Samson."

The boisterous dispute of course put an end to business for the present, and the attention of all was turned on the two antagonists.

"I'll not fight; in the first place, because there's nothing to fight about," said Tom Talbot, quietly; "and in the second place, because we are, as the worthy President expresses it, a band of brothers, companions in arms, and to fight among ourselves would be monstrous. Calm yourself, dear sir," he said to M'Nab, who could scarcely keep his excitement within bounds, "always keep cool and calm—allow me to finish my speech—for the reason above given, I cannot and will not fight, which is fortunate for you."

"May the de'il fly away wi' me—but I'll make you pay for this," shouted Hector, infuriated almost beyond bearing at the quiet, impassive way in which Talbot said it was a good thing for him.

"Be calm, my good friend, be calm," pursued the Englishman, or the Sassenach, as Hector M'Nab chose to call him; "don't lose your temper, but permit me to finish what I was saying, that I would not fight—but I tell you what I will do, I will give you a wrestle for two dozen bottles of champagne—that will be one all round, and four for our worshipful President."

"Done wi' you," shouted M'Nab "I'll ha' ye over my head 'fore ye know wha's got a hold o' ye—come

on, I'm ready for you—say your prayers and make your will, for up through the ceiling and down through the floor you're bound to go, my lad."

The Scotchman at once commenced preparing himself for this trial of strength and skill, by throwing off his coat and vest, and in half a minute stood stripped to the shirt.

A fine raw-boned, powerful man, he looked, with face like cast-iron, the great bones showing through the swarthy skin of his face—his strong, lean, sinewy arms, and his old gaunt frame instinct, as it were, with strength—not an ounce of fat—nothing but bone, sinew, and muscle. And yet, despise his gauntness, the Scotchman weighed over twelve stone.

John Talbot regarded him with quiet curiosity, as though he were examining the merits of a horse. "Not so bad—very fair indeed, but not enough flesh—overtrained I should say—wind good, stay well but not strength enough for a severe tussle."

"Come on, man," cried M'Nab; "don't stand there jabbering, like a sawney. Come and let's prove which is the best man."

"What now?" said Talbot, lifting his eye-brows.

"Eh! now, there's no time like the present."

"Well, there's something in that," replied the other slowly: "If I've got to go up through the ceiling, or down through the floor, I may as well have it over." Then, casting his eyes around, he stepped back towards a large recess in which there was a window. "I think," he said, "there will be plenty of room here, that is, if you don't want to fly all about the place. Perhaps if some of you gentle-

men were to move this long table a little farther back it would be better. What do you think, Captain O'Rourke?"

The worthy President was quite non-plussed. This sort of thing was, of course, entirely out of order, and in his official capacity he should at once have put a stop to it. But, on the other hand, he was an Irishman, and loved sport dearly ; and to put a stop to a friendly wrestling match for two dozen of champagne—ah ! that went sorely against his heart. So he decided to make a compromise with himself, and, without sacrificing his official dignity, see the fun.

"I leave it to you entirely, gentlemen, I leave the chair of state, and am now one of yourselves. Far be it from Dennis O'Rourke to interfere with any gentleman's recreation."

"Very good, then," said Talbot. "Now some of you fellows be kind enough to move the table a yard or so back. Our friend Rob Roy M'Gregor here, will very likely fall that way, and it's a pity he should hurt his head."

"Wait awhile, laddie, wait awhile, and Rob Roy M'Gregor will gie ye sich a heave as you've not had this many a day."

While the table was being moved, a work of some little difficulty, John Talbot was deliberately divesting himself of his upper garments. He took off even his shirt, as he wore a tight fitting flannel beneath. When stripped to this, the outline of his magnificent physique struck all present with surprise and admiration. He was broader across the chest and shoulders, bigger round the chest than the Scotch-

man. His limbs were larger, and the muscles of his arms and upper part of the body stood out as it were in brawny lumps. If this muscle were only of good quality, then there would be little doubt of his superiority to M'Nab, in strength as in weight.

Even the bouncable Hector looked not without surprise on the Samson-like proportions of his antagonist. With his clothes on, the Englishman did not look by any means so formidable. He wore his coat loose fitting, and this concealed the powerful muscles of his chest, shoulders, and arms. Indeed, to a casual observer, from his lazy, somewhat slouching style, John Talbot might have been considered as a big lout, clumsy, and probably carrying fat instead of muscle.

The competitors were now all ready, when Mr. Sextus Miller, F.R.G.S., &c., put in—

“But gentlemen, really I must protest—at least I have no right to do that, I mean to say I would suggest—is this quite the sort of thing for an hotel of this character? Will the landlord be pleased at his room being made the arena for a gladiatorial contest? I think, really—.”

“To thunder and blazes wid the landlord,” shouted Captain O'Rourke, who, now relieved from the trammels and responsibilities of office, was anxious to see fun; “to the devil wid the landlord, what's the landlord got to do wid it, at all, at all, I'd loike to know? Shure, didn't we pay for his room, didn't we hire it by the week? Faith we did, and I, Captain O'Rourke, of Ballysmashem Castle, County Clare, Ireland, am security and responsibility for all

damage; so by the piper that played before Moses, we'll throw the room out o' window if we please, in spite of the landlord."

This curious Hibernianism elicited a roar of laughter, and Mr. Sextus Miller shut up, and quietly stood by.

And now the partisans of the two champions gathered each on the side of his man. Ranged around and behind John Talbot, were Roland Dane, Jacob Knox, Tally-ho Thompson, Dare Devil Dick, Dion Thorold, the Cambridge M.A.—himself an athlete—and Buffalo Slack, the Texan hunter, who counselled Talbot somewhat mysteriously to give him the "Alleghanny twist," whatever that might be.

"Captain Carrambole," on the other hand, with the Hon. Percy Claverton, Jack Rutter the cannibal, with some others, backed up the Scotchman, who they thought, though not so lean and muscular, was more wiry and likely to last.

The cannibal, indeed, expressed his opinion strongly in his own peculiar way. "Go in and win, Sandy; you'll tire him out easy, he's as tender as a chicken, big as he is; kill him and eat him."

Dr. Columba surveyed the two athletes with professional eyes. "Two splendid specimens of the genus homo," he said; "the Scotchman a little too thin, but the wind's good—broad, flat chest; hardly enough muscle and fat, though. The human frame wants fat, as an engine does oil, to make it work smoothly. Talbot looks in good condition—splendid animal, good chest, a trifle too much flesh about the shoulders, but if his lungs are sound, he'll win."

And now all was ready for the friendly trial of strength and skill. The door was locked and bolted, and a clear space left for the two competitors.

They advanced to meet each other.

“Are you ready?” asked Talbot.

“Aye, and willing,” replied the Scotchman sharply.

The next instant they were locked in a tight embrace. It was at this very time that the Lady Maude, yielding to Ellen Carmichael’s persuasion, was writing a note to Roland Dane.



CHAPTER XIV.

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH.

HECTOR M'NAB was quickest, and got the under grip, which advantage he instantly strove to turn to account by lifting his antagonist, and throwing him by a sudden exertion of strength ; an attempt which failed utterly, for John Talbot was only moved a little. He settled down on his feet again, and stood firm as a rock, and like a rock suffered Hector M'Nab to waste his strength in a vain endeavour to throw him. After about half a minute of this, he in turn put forth his strength, and by a quick movement, getting his left leg behind M'Nab, exerted his whole force to bend back the Scotchman's body. Vainly the latter sought to shift his position. The Sassenach stood rooted to the ground, as it were, and the only thing for it was to resist with all his power the attempt to force back his body. For a second or two the issue seemed to sway in the balance. The muscles and veins of each swelled like great ropes and thin blue cord ; and they swayed to and fro from the violence of the exertion.

Every one held his breath. It was clear that the issue of the struggle depended upon the ability of the Scotchman to resist the determined effort of his

opponent to force his body backward. The descendant of Rob Roy struggled splendidly to resist the tremendous pressure the great strength of the Englishman enabled him to exert. It was in doubt for, perhaps, a quarter of a minute. Then the dark cast-iron countenance of Hector M'Ivor M'Gregor M'Nab was seen to go slowly backward and downward, inch by inch. A little longer he still struggled, unwilling to own defeat, though utterly beaten. All at once, with a quick puff of pent up breath, his muscles relaxed, unable longer to bear the strain; and the Englishman also relaxing his grasp, he fell gently backwards on to the carpet—a beaten man.

John Talbot never even moved his feet from the spot where they were planted, and beyond a heaving of the chest, showed little sign of the intense exertion he had used to overthrow M'Nab. Turning to Jack Butler, Talbot, who had heard his words about his being tender, said quietly: "Cannibal, our friend M'Nab is by no means tender, but you're quite welcome to eat him, if he doesn't mind."

Hector M'Nab rose, and owned himself beaten.

"A fair game, and a fool's loss," he said; "I'd no business to let you get your leg behind me."

"And I'd no business to let you get the under grip," said Talbot; "if it hadn't been for that I should have thrown you easier. However, it's just as well as it was, it was a fair and straight trial of strength."

"I grant that," said the Scotchman; "I've lost, let's shake hands o'er it, and be better friends than

ever, as becomes two of the twenty captains after a trial of skill."

"With all my heart; you've lost two dozen of wine, and instead of you being the strongest man in the room, it is I who am."

"No, I'm d——d if you are, not while I'm present," said a voice behind John Talbot.

Turning, he saw Samson Slamm, the ex-blacksmith, who seldom said a word.

He had watched the trial of strength with great interest, and when the men stripped, had ranged himself on the winning side.

"I'm the strongest man within twenty miles of the village where I came from, and for aught I know within a hundred miles; men have come further than that to try a fall with me, and have gone home beaten. Now I call that an arm," Samson said, with just pride, as he bared a limb thick as the thigh of many a man; "now that's what I call an arm," reiterated the blacksmith, "and I'm all over alike."

John Talbot looked with genuine admiration, for he himself, priding himself on physical strength and muscularity, could appreciate it in another.

It is by no means unlikely that the ex-blacksmith having put forward a claim to be the strongest man in the room, that a second passage of arms would have taken place. But the President, Captain O'Rourke, thought it incumbent on him to resume his official seat, and call the assembly to order. And, indeed, it was time for a more tumultuous or noisy assembly it would be difficult to conceive. All were

excited, and a loud discussion was going on concerning the merits of the three strong men ; and several urged that the question as to who was absolutely chief among the twenty in physical strength should now be decided once for all. But, to the great disappointment of these, and the joy of the landlord of the hotel, who outside the locked door listened in fear and trembling to the tumult within, Captain O'Rourke insisted that business should be resumed. So the uproar gradually subsided, and once again the Twenty were seated around the long table to attend to business.

“ Gentlemen, and companions in arms,” the President said ; “ we are now, indeed, a band of brothers, all having been balloted in and admitted.”

“ Captain President, I beg pardon for interrupting, but I wish to call your attention to the fact that my friend, Mr. Jacob Knox, has not been balloted in and admitted.”

“ Ah ! well,” said O'Rourke, nothing disconcerted : “ that can be done at once : a mere matter of form I imagine.”

There was not a single black ball in the ballot-box when examined by the President, so that Jacob was unanimously admitted one of the fraternity.

“ And now, gentlemen, that the ceremony of admission has been gone through by us all, I will proceed to read and display to you certain articles of association—rules and regulations I have had drawn up. We will proceed to discuss them, and any alterations, additions, or omissions can be made

“ RULE 1.—This association to be limited to

twenty gentlemen, all holding equal rank and authority."

Roland Dane again rose here and addressing the President and meeting called his attention to the fact that by the admission of Jacob Knox, there were now twenty-one who had been duly balloted for and passed.

At first this seemed likely to cause a difficulty—and the gallant President was completely nonplussed ; either Rule I. must be abrogated, it seemed, or else be a dead-letter.

Jacob Knox, however, solved the difficulty.

"Captain President, and gentlemen," he said, "I think I see a way by which this state of affairs may be remedied. I have already said that I do not claim to be admitted on equal terms, as I cannot pay my share of the money. I propose then that while the other twenty are of equal rank and hold equal power, that I be appointed to a subordinate position."

O'Rourke, glad to see a way out of the dilemma, spoke :—

"By my faith, gentlemen, and companions in arms, a very fair and reasonable offer. I propose that Mr Jacob Knox hold the rank of lieutenant, so that there will then be twenty captains, as originally proposed, and one lieutenant."

This suggestion was at once adopted, and a few words tacked on to Rule I., providing for the new lieutenant.

"Only nominal, my boy, you know," whispered Roland Dane ; "you will in reality hold equal rank with ourselves."

Jacob Knox made no reply in words, but thanked his friend with a grateful look.

“The next rule I shall propose to the worshipful company,” the President continued, “is—

RULE II.—All matters in dispute to be referred to the vote of the association, who may, if they think fit, appoint a committee of investigation.”

This was passed unanimously

“**RULE III.**—All money expenditure to be decided on by a vote of the members, or by a committee to whom power has been delegated.”

The next was

“**RULE IV.**—A treasurer and other officers to be appointed by vote of the members—these to be removed at pleasure. The treasurer to have charge of all public money, for which he will be responsible and have to render a daily account.”

“**RULE V.**—All enterprises and other undertakings, of whatever nature, to be decided by vote. In case of a dispute or objection to any enterprise or plan an absolute majority necessary to carry it.”

“That is to say,” the President explained, “that supposing seventeen of the twenty-one only voted, the majority must consist of eleven at least—a majority of the whole number, not of seventeen which would be nine.”

“RULE VI.—All members shall be bound by the vote of the majority, or of a committee appointed by the majority, and endorsed by the President; and any member refusing so to do shall be summoned before the whole body, and may be expelled, with forfeiture of all money, rights, and privileges, or dealt with in any way the majority think fit.”

This rule elicited considerable discussion and opposition, Sextus Miller, Esq., and Dionysius Thorold especially maintaining that it was philosophically wrong; that it opened the way for that greatest of all tyrannies—the tyranny of a bare majority.

Nevertheless, the company not being in the humour to discuss any such abstract philosophical questions, the rule was ultimately carried.

Several other rules and by-laws of minor importance were read and carried, and then the President came to an important affair of his own concoction. This was no other than a general statement of the objects, intentions, and duties of the expeditionary society. It was a gem in its way, and the gallant O'Rourke was very proud of the composition.

“Whereas we, the undersigned members of an association for mutual amusement, profit, and assistance, choose to designate ourselves the Twenty Captains, we hereby put on record and attest by our signatures our intentions and obligations as members of a chivalric brotherhood, companions in arms, in sports, in all honourable enterprises. Firstly, we

engage to support each other truly and loyally at the peril of life or limb, and if necessary, at the cost of bloodshed. Furthermore, we do solemnly engage to embark in no dishonourable enterprise, to do nothing, either singly or collectively, which a noble knight of old or a gentleman of the present day need blush at—in short, to conduct ourselves in all things as chevaliers, *sans peur et sans reproche*. We engage on all possible occasions to protect and assist the weak, the down-trodden, and the oppressed; and especially shall we consider it our bounden duty and highest pleasure to aid, comfort, and champion by all means within our power any woman who, by reason of misfortune or the machinations of enemies, shall be in danger or fear, bodily or mental, and by using our purses and perilling our bodies, prove ourselves gallant gentlemen, companions in adventure, brothers in arms, worthy to call ourselves by the proud title of the Twenty Captains. And hereto we affix our signatures."

Captain O'Rourke read this effusion with conscious pride, and many—among them Roland Dane—could not help smiling at the grandiloquent sentences and somewhat bombastic sentiments of the declaration their president had drawn up.

However, O'Rourke was really a warm-hearted, good fellow, and no one cared to give him pain by cavilling at his beloved effusion, and all agreed to put their signature thereto.

"And," said the President, flushing with satisfied pride after the unanimous burst of applause which marked the willingness of those present to subscribe

to his rules and declaration, “such of you as have any other name—as the French say, *soubriquet* or *nom de guerre*—will please sign it also, as it is as well we should all know each other by every name others may.”

This was assented to, and produced rather a curious result.

The President himself, in a large bold hand, signed his name at the top :—

1. Captain Dennis O'Rourke, President, of Ballysmashem Castle, county Clare, Ireland, officer and gentleman.
2. John Rutter *alias* Cannibal Jack, seaman, adventurer, and citizen of the world.
3. Hector M'Ivor M'Gregor M'Nab, *alias* the Deil o' Dundee, Highland chief and gentleman.
4. Richard Rollo, *alias* Dare Devil Dick, gentleman
5. Captain Carrambole, late 14th Lancers.
6. Colonel Slack, *alias* Buffalo Slack, Texan hunter, bear and buffalo killer—a whole team and a dog under the bar.
7. John Talbot, gentleman.
8. Theobald Thompson, *alias* Tally-ho Thompson, gentleman.
9. Sextus Miller, F.R.G.S., &c., astronomer, and student of science.
10. Honourable Percy Claverton.
11. Dionysius Thorold, M.A., Cambridge.
12. Benjamin Bouncer, gentleman.
13. Dr. Columbus, *alias* Old Calomel, M.R.C.S., M.D.
14. Tom Steele, farmer, of Buscot, Berks.

15. Roland Dane, gentleman.
16. Sam Dawson, Yorkshire, horse dealer.
17. Jonathan Johnson, engineer.
18. Samson Slamm, blacksmith, the strongest man of the lot.*
19. Solomon Lobb, master mariner.
20. Jacob Knox, weaver, Lancashire, lieutenant only.
21. Sir Robert Barclay, (Signed in proxy by the President, the baronet being unavoidably absent.)

“I am well assured,” explained the President, “that my good friend Sir Robert would not object to my signing for him in his absence, as he was balloted for in his absence.”

Thus there stood the roll of the Twenty Captains and the single lieutenant, Jacob Knox.

“Now, gentlemen, we are all sworn brothers, companions in arms. Open the champagne bottles—let’s drink glorious success to the expedition and the Twenty Captains.”

The toast was drunk with uproarious applause, and a scene of wild uproar and confusion ensued difficult to imagine, still more so to describe.

Hector M’Nab set the example by leaping on his chair and planting one foot on the table. He was followed by half a score others, waving their glasses and shouting at the top of their voices. Then all

* The worthy blacksmith was determined to put his opinion on record.

the others caught the infection, and the whole twenty were in an instant standing one foot on chair one on the table, each glass in hand, shouting approval of the toast. Whisky punch and excitement had quite finished the Twenty Captains off their good behaviour, and even the steadiest gave way to the enthusiasm of the moment, and joined in the extraordinary tableau.

The gallant President stood with one foot on the chair of honour, the other on the table, waving his glass on high, and shouting vociferously. All down the table, on either side, the same was done. All at once, just as the cheering grew fainter by reason more than anything of absolute exhaustion, Hector McNab cried, in a voice clearly audible above the din “‘Auld Lang Syne,’ boys! Let’s have ‘Auld Lang Sync! ’”

Then he commenced the old Scotch air;

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind,” &c.

the whole company joining in the chorus most heartily.

“Hands across,” yelled the Scotchman, now excited to a pitch of frenzy. “On the table, every man of you, and join hands across.”

Suiting the action to the word, he leaped on the table, and grasping the hand of the one opposite half dragged him on.

The example was contagious. Everybody followed it, and in a second or two the whole twenty were on the table, clasping hands across, and shouting the chorus of “Auld Lang Sync!”

Suddenly there was a creaking and swaying of the table, and before any one could remove, with one tremendous crash the whole came to the floor—glasses, punch-bowl, bottles, and the redoubtable Twenty Captains. All mingled pell-mell and in wild disorder.

The noise of the crash was something tremendous, and was echoed by the shrieking of the maid-servants and others, who thought that the whole house was coming down.

The gallant O'Rourke had been precipitated headlong to the floor with the others, and when he rose to his feet blood was flowing from a cut in the forehead.

Several others, too, had come to grief in a similar manner, and though no serious harm was done to any, half a dozen had scratched and bleeding faces and heads.

For a moment it seemed as though this smash would cool the hot blood of, and put an end to, the boisterous conviviality of the party. But there were those present whose spirit were not to be damped by such a trifling affair.

Chief among these was Hector M'Nab. When he rose to his feet, he wiped his face, slightly cut with glass, and then gave vent to a wild Highland yell, which echoed through the room, and indeed all the house.

“O'Rourke, my bonnie lad,” he shouted to the President, “here's something like a smash for you. Out with fife, man, and give us the 'Rocky Road to Dublin,' and by the claymore o' Rob Roy M'Gregor,

we'll have a horncpipe on the ruins. Blaze away, my lad—the 'Rocky Road to Dublin.' ”

And with the words M'Nab began whistling the popular jig which sets every Irishman's feet going involuntarily.

Captain O'Rourke was unable to resist the appeal, and, to the astonishment of those few who kept sober enough to watch what was going on, he immediately struck up the tune in a high-pitched key, which sounded clear and shrill through the room, above all other noises whatever.

The Scotchman's feet rattled out time on the *debris* quickly and well, and scarcely had he begun than he was joined by another, who placed himself opposite, arms on hips, and started off at the jig at the rate of about forty miles an hour.

This was Darby Kelly, the big Irishman, who we mentioned was posted at the slate at the first meeting of the council, and who was still at his post, though we have had no occasion to speak of him since.

The familiar air, to which most likely he had many times stepped it at Donnybrook Fair and elsewhere, was too much for his equanimity, and throwing down the chalk he held as badge, he dashed into it and was soon pounding away with his ponderous feet, encased in ponderous boots, making as much clatter as a horse on his hind legs.

The infection was catching. The President himself—the gallant O'Rourke—could not withstand it, and soon he, too, was thumping away on the floor with his feet, and keeping time to the shrill music of the pipe.

This latter was somewhat of an encumbrance to the free and rapid action of his legs, and Jacob Knox, with a quiet smile, touched him on the shoulder, then by dumb show (to hear one's voice except at a shout was impossible) intimated that he would play the pipe, and held out his hand.

O'Rourke gave him the little instrument, and with scarce a second's pause Jacob took up the air, and piped it shriller, louder, clearer, and with better marked time than the President.

"Good, lad—good, lad," shouted the excited O'Rourke; "more power to you!" And away went his feet, half as fast again.

"Hurroosh!" shouted Darby Kelly, at the top of his voice. "We're the boys for blood and thunder. Give us 'Garryowen' for a change, mister piper."

Jacob Knox, glad to oblige those who had so kindly taken to him, obeyed, and changed the tune without stopping an instant, a feat which endeared him greatly to the gallant captain.

Mr. Richard Rollo, known as Dare Devil Dick, next yielded to the charm of the potent music, and there were two pairs of half-mad dancers prancing madly to quick music among the ruins of tables, glasses, decanters, and so forth.

It did not stop at this: more fast and furious grew the fun, and one by one others joined, till the whole twenty, with the exception of the fifer and Mr. Sextus Miller, were capering like maniacs, all dancing together, making a tremendous din, if they did not keep very strict time.

Even that learned gentleman, *Sextus Miller*, *F. R. G. S.*, &c, as he looked through his spectacles at the wild scene, smiled benignantly, while he said to himself, “What a lot of mad-brained rascals I have got among! Who would ever have thought I should have been one among such a company? That whisky punch was very strong, and I really do believe I should have considerable trouble in observing the transit of Jupiter just now, even if opportunity offered.”

The thundering noise made by eighteen pairs of feet all thumping their hardest to the same tune and keeping no time at all, but every one helping to increase the din, may be well imagined. When to this is added an occasional wild Irish “whoop!” from *Darby Kelly*, varied by a Highland shriek from *M’Nab*, mingled with loud cries of encouragement from the gallant *O’Rourke*—laughter, the crashing of glass and smashing of the wood-work of the table, it may well be imagined that the din was truly terrific.

Certain it is that such a mad orgie, or anything approaching to it, had never before taken place in the Cavendish Hotel; and the landlord, although he knew that he was safe to be reimbursed for all actual damage, was absolutely aghast at the tremendous uproar.

Standing at the open door of the room, with waiters, chambermaids, and astonished visitors behind him, he gazed at the scene, almost hidden in a cloud of dust, with mute helplessness. They seemed like a lot of demons dancing amidst a thick smoke,

and in the confusion of dancing, shifting forms, he was unable to make out any one distinctly.

The Irishman and M'Nab, not content with dancing against each other, tried, it would seem, which could emit the most terrible and unearthly yells and whoops.

There is an end to all things, however, and gradually the ardour of the dancers abated as fatigue asserted its sway. Perceiving which, Jacob Knox suddenly ceased playing, and in a few moments the eighteen pair of clattering feet were still, and the terpsichorean champions stood panting and blowing among the ruins.

"Hoot, lad! but it was fine while it lasted," said the Scotchman, wiping his brow.

"Ah, be my soul!" said O'Rourke, enthusiastically (he always spoke with a broad brogue when excited), "but I've not seen the like for this twenty year, and then it was at a wake in county Clare."

When the dust had cleared away a little and the noise had quite subsided, the landlord of the hotel came forward.

"Really, Captain O'Rourke," he said, "this is most extraordinary conduct. I can't have my house made a wreck and ruin of, all my customers disturbed, and the neighbourhood, too, in this way."

Captain O'Rourke pulled himself together, as the saying is, and was instantly all dignity and importance.

"Mister, mister, I don't know what the devil your name is—I only know you as the landlord of this inn. I'd have you to know, sir, that we can pay

for what we break. I, Captain Dennis O'Rourke, of Ballysmashem Castle, county Clare, Ireland, will guarantee it. Yes, sir, we can pay for what we break, and such being the case, we'll break what we d——d please, and that's all about it. We hire this room from you, sir. At present it is ours, not yours. Be good enough instantly to leave the *council chamber*."

No one but an Irishman could have delivered such an impudent speech in such a delightfully audacious manner.

The landlord was aghast—dumbfounded, and could not reply a word. He gazed around on the scene of ruin, and murmuring feebly "the council chamber!" moved slowly to the door. Then he turned, and had another long look at the wreck and the mad-brained crew around.

A great many had stripped to their shirts, some had blood on their faces and scratches, others had hastily tied handkerchiefs round their heads, where cut in the original downfall.

Altogether they looked as wild and dissipated as ever it was possible to conceive.

"The council chamber!" groaned the landlord, "a neat thing in council chambers." Then he threw up his hands, and retreated in mingled despair and disgust, and was seen no more.

"And now, gentlemen companions in arms," said O'Rourke, in a loud, but calm voice, as though nothing particular had happened—merely a little interlude between the acts, indeed—"we have several little affairs to settle. To business!"

The table was utterly demolished, the chairs overturned, and mostly broken, and even the President's throne upset.

The slate was smashed, the ballot-box was in "smithoreens," as O'Rourke himself said, half the worthy companions in arms, as he so delighted in speaking of them, with marks on their faces, hands, or heads, in the way of cuts and scratches—all flushed, dusty, hot, and excited.

And the President, with marvellous coolness, called on them to resume business, as if table, chairs, glasses, papers, ballot-box, and slate were exactly as before.

Dr. Columba, or old Calomel as they called him had already begun to show his professional usefulness to the fraternity. He had produced a case from his pocket, in which were lint, diachylon plaster, a small phial of balsam, and dreadful-looking bright steel instruments, and was busy strapping up the cuts of the wounded. While he was so employed, a footman in neat plain livery appeared at the door: he gazed around in utter bewilderment for a moment or two, and then, his errand being pressing, advanced into the room.

"Is there a gentleman named Roland Dane here?" he asked.

"Yes" replied that personage, going up to him, "that is my name."

"A letter and a packet, sir. It is immediate."

Roland Dane tore off the paper covering of the packet first, and a real miniature portrait, about the size of the palm of his hand, fell on the ground.

He picked it up, glanced at it, and then hastily followed the bearer, who had reached the door “Who gave you this?” he asked, excitedly; “who sent you with this?”

“A lady sir. The letter will explain.”

“Where is she?”

“The letter will explain.”

Roland then tore open the letter, and proceeded to read it.



CHAPTER XV.

LADY MAUDE'S APPEAL.—THE TWENTY CAPTAINS
TO THE RESCUE.

The letter ran thus:—

Dear friend,—For so, after what you have already done for me, I venture to call you,—I am in danger, in deadly peril. You said that if ever you could serve me you would. I send you the miniature because I promised to do so, and also as a token. I am now at Victoria station ; I start almost immediately, by special train, for Dover. I am followed, my every movement watched by my most bitter foe. If I can only arrive safely at Dover, and get across the Channel in the morning to Calais, I am safe ; but I fear that this wicked man, my enemy, will follow in another special train. If he catches me, I am lost. Help me, follow me also if you can,—you save a poor faithful girl, my only friend. I am all alone. Come.

MAUDE.

The touching simplicity of the letter, the earnest appeal for his aid—so innocently and yet so urgently asked for, would have caused him probably to pay heed to it had it been from a total stranger ;—that stranger a woman in fear, and helpless, Roland

Dane took a few turns up and down, and then his mind was made up.

By instinct or inspiration he hit upon the best possible plan for enlisting the sympathies of his wild companions.

“Captain President and gentlemen all,” he cried in a loud voice from the very centre of the room, “I have just received a letter—a letter important to me, as it will appear to all of us, I hope and believe.” Then having attracted attention, and commanded silence by these few words, he paused.

“Mr. Secretary Darby Kelly, be good enough to close the door; what I have to communicate is private, and not to be listened to by waiters and maid-servants.” The gigantic Irishman, full of importance, proud of being, thus addressed, strode to the open door, looking so fierce and terrible, that the waiters and maids scattered like sheep at the approach of the wolf; and closing the door with a slam, he posted himself there as sentry.

Roland Dane now went up to Captain O’Rourke, who stood by the overturned throne doing his best to look dignified, and placed in his hand the miniature portrait of her whom he knew only as Lady Maude.

O’Rourke looked at it.

“By my faith, but that’s as near a fairy face as ever I set eye on. She’s an Irish girl, that, for a bottle.”

Roland smiled, said nothing, and handed it to the next, who happened to be John Talbot. He looked intently, and then a sad expression came over his features.

"A sweet face indeed ; it reminds me of a poor sister of mine whom we lost years ago."

The next he handed it to was Hector M'Nab.

He too gazed intently, and then cried with enthusiasm,—

"Hey, what a bonnie lass. It's just a portrait of Mary Queen o' Scots, I'm thinking."

Roland smiled and shook his head, and then handed it to Jacob Knox without a word. Jacob looked hard at it, and then in his friend's face—"St. James's Park," he said. Roland nodded, and handed it to another.

And so on until all had looked on the beautiful miniature.

Almost perfect silence now reigned. The company seemed to feel that something important was to come and every one was anxious and expectant.

Roland Dane now sought out and picked up the paper with the rules, the chivalric and elaborate declaration composed by the President, and to which they had all affixed their signatures.

"Captain President, and gentlemen all," said Roland, holding the broad sheet before him, "I will now, with permission, read out to you the concluding passage from the eloquent declaration our honourable President drew up, and which we all signed."

Then he read out, in a clear loud voice :—

We engage on all possible occasions to protect and assist the weak the downtrodden, and the oppressed ; and especially shall we consider it our bounden duty and highest pleasure to aid, comfort, and champion by all means within our power, any woman whoby

reason of misfortune, or the machinations of enemies, shall lie in danger or fear—bodily or mental, and by using our purses, and perilling our bodies, prove ourselves gallant gentlemen, companions in adventure, brothers in arms,—worth to call ourselves by the proud title of the Twenty Captains, and hereto affix our signatures.

He paused for a little while, and then spoke again.

“ And now, gentlemen, I come to the point;—the hour, the moment has come for us to prove ourselves what the President designated us, gallant gentlemen and companions in arms.

“ A lady is in trouble—in deadly peril from bad men. That lady is the original of the miniature I have shown you, and I may say I have the honour of her acquaintance; although I own, despite its seeming so mysterious, that I don’t know her name, beyond this, that she is called the Lady Maude. I will read you her letter to me, and then, gentlemen, companions in arms, it will be for you to decide.”

Roland Dane then in a fine clear voice read the simple appeal of the persecuted Lady Maude right through.

When he had finished, and as he folded up the letter he said, “ I pledge my word and honour that this is a case in which honourable men should champion the weak and the persecuted. As for me I hasten to the assistance of the lady.” Then raising his voice and holding up one hand with the letter therein, he cried aloud, “ Who is with me in this enterprise, who will make one with Roland Dane, to protect, if necessary, rescue this lady.”

“I am with you,” cried Jacob Knox, clapping his hand on his shoulder.

The next who spoke was, strange to say, the usually somewhat slow and lethargic John Talbot.

“I’ll make one with all my heart,” he said, and with the words ranged himself alongside of Roland and Jacob,

“And by the piper that played before Moses,” cried the President, enthusiastically, “it’s myself, Dennis O’Rourke, that’s with you, too, heart and soul.”

The affair was soon settled.

“And I am with you.”

“And I.”

“And I.”

“And I.”

“Lead us on at once.”

“Hurrah for Lady Maude!” shouted Dare Devil Dick. “We’re the boys will pull her through her trouble.”

In less than a minute Roland Dane found himself surrounded by all the associates, eager to know what should be done—eager to do it, whatever it might be.

“Gentlemen,” said Roland, addressing them, “in the first place, we must do as the lady requests—hasten to Victoria station. When there we must be guided by events.”

Now spoke up the President:—

“Gentlemen, Mr Dane is right. We must hasten to Victoria Station. We are about to embark on an enterprise perhaps of difficulty and danger. We

don't know how we shall get on or when or where we shall finish, for once a thing is taken in hand, it must not be lightly relinquished. Let each gentleman arrange his affairs, provide himself with money and necessaries, and then we will start. I will settle with the landlord for the breakages and rent, and submit the account afterwards. Waiter, tell the proprietor that Captain O'Rourke wishes to speak to him in the council-chamber."

The waiter did not venture to laugh or make any remark, but he, too, looked round with an air of bewilderment and dismay at what the gallant captain still persisted in dignifying with the name of council-chamber.

"And look here, waiter. Order ten Hansom cabs to be at the door in five minutes."

O'Rourke's business with the landlord was soon settled—satisfactorily to the latter, who concluded that, though he had let his long room to a party of madmen, they paid very well.

In the meanwhile there was a general rush of each to his respective room, and soon the whole twenty were assembled again in the wrecked council-chamber, awaiting orders from their chief.

Those who were not stopping in the hotel proposed to drive to their own lodgings, got what they required, and then rendezvous at the Victoria Station.

"Now, gentlemen," cried O'Rourke, "this association may be put to expense through this adventure——"

"I will bear all the expense, so far as lays in my power," interrupted Roland Dane, hotly

“Yes, yes, I dare say you will, but that will not be allowed. You can neither have all the honour nor bear all the cost yourself. Be good enough not to interrupt the President. As I was saying, gentlemen, it is possible we may be put to some expense, and therefore there ought to be a general fund. We have not yet elected a treasurer, but in the meantime I will volunteer the responsibility, that is if I am considered trustworthy.”

“Yes! yes! yes!” resounded on all hands.

“Then I propose that each member makes a payment of one-tenth of the agreed sum—namely, fifty pounds. There are twenty of us present, including myself, and of course I shall contribute my fifty. That will make up a sum of one thousand pounds, for which I will be accountable. Here, waiter, bring a table—the large one is rather dilapidated.”

Rather dilapidated. It was in little pieces—splinters, as M’Nab expressed it, not a bit to be found big enough for a toothpick.

The enormous audacity and impudence of the Irish President quite flabbergasted the landlord. He took things so coolly, but, however, paid so royally, that the worthy host knew not what to make of him.

The small table was brought, and Captain O’Rourke, seating himself, proceeded to give each a receipt for fifty pounds on account, and taking the notes as they were handed to him, placed them on the table before him until all was finished.

Then he gathered up the thousand pounds he had insisted on publicly, putting his own fifty with the

rest, placed the notes in his pocket book, and rising, said :

“Now, gentlemen, we are ready. Cabs are at the door—two in each. Such of us as have nowhere else to go will make at once for Victoria Station ; those who have to call anywhere will do so, and then drive on like blazes to the rendezvous.”

Then O'Rourke, shouldering a railway rug, strode to the door and down the broad stairs, and out into the street, where a whole line of Hansom cabs were waiting.

The noble brotherhood entered these—two in each, Roland Dane having for his companion the strange silent middle aged man, Abel Johnson, whom no one could make out.

Dr. Columba and Sextus Miller walked out together.

Said the latter, “I little thought I should ever be one among such a lot of dare-devils. But really, upon my soul, their high animal spirits and enthusiasm are positively infectious, and I feel full of ardour for this Quixotic enterprise, and at the same time ashamed of myself.

“Devil a bit of shame do I feel,” replied the Scotch doctor. “They are mad-brained, harum-scarum lot but I should not wonder if their very audacity didn’t carry them through, with money to back it, which there is. I should not be surprised, friend Miller, if by this cruise we’re going to make, of whatever nature it may be, we didn’t clear each of us a good round sum for our shares. For mind you, mad as they seem, there is a deal of method in their madness

There's the President, Captain O'Rourke, is by no means a fool in a commercial point of view. I tell you I should not be surprised if we didn't make more money in six months with these harum-scarums than you will in star-gazing or I in practising physic all our lives."

" My good sir, I do not study astronomy, to which I presume you allude, for money, but for the love of science, to which I am wedded."

" Ah, yes, exactly," said the doctor, drily, " as I may be wedded to a pretty girl some day; but I tell you what, I shall like her none the less if she's got a few thousands to bring by way of dowry."

The doctor was a very practical man indeed.

Hector M'Ivor M'Gregor M'Nab was the last who descended the broad staircase of the hotel. As he did so he was singing that rare old scotch song, " Bonnie Dundee."

As he crossed the hall and approached the swinging glass door which shut out the draught and rain, he motioned with his hand for them to be thrown open for him, singing:

"Then open the West Gate, and let him gang free,
For the town is well rid of the deil o' Dundee."

" Well rid of the diel o' Dundee, indeed," the landlord said, as M'Nab jumped into a cab, still singing " Bonnie Dundee," " and all the diel o' Dundee's friends. They pay well, and so they ought, for surely there never were such a set of madmen congregated all together out of Bedlam or Colney Hatch.

Away went the Twenty Captains in ten Hansom cabs, and all hastening to the aid and rescue of the Lady Maude.

The enterprise on which they had entered was indeed a mad one apparently, for of the whole number Roland Dane and Jacob Knox were the only ones who had even seen the Lady whom they proposed to champion.

Before arriving at Victoria Station, Roland Dane, who was in the first cab, called a halt, selecting as well as he could remember the very spot in the Mall of St. James' Park where he and Jacob Knox had been able to render such efficient aid to Lady Maude.

It was a strange sight, ten hansom cabs all drawn up together in the now dark and lonely Mall.

Roland Dane, knowing most of this strange affair, although he himself knew next to nothing, acted as spokesman.

He and O'Rourke had decided as they rode along in the cab that it would be better to give as clear an explanation as possible of the objects of this enterprise.

At the Hotel it would have been imprudent in the extreme to have gone into particulars, for as the old saying runs "stone walls have ears," and, such being the case, so undoubtedly had waiters and servants.

"Now, gentlemen," said Roland, "I will at once plunge *in medias res*, and tell you that this adventure, enterprise, escapade—call it what you like—is a dangerous one.

“If there are any among you who disapprove of the affair, or feel disinclined to run the risk, let them speak after I have explained matters to the best of my knowledge. My object is to champion and rescue a lady of whom we know next to nothing. All I can say is this. I witnessed an attempt at abduction by two men on this lady near the spot where we now stand. Wrongly or rightly I interfered, and but for the arrival of our friend Jacob Knox on the scene should have fared badly. As it was, all triumphed, and I was enabled to see the lady safely into her brougham, which was waiting at a short distance. Since then I have heard from the same lady that she is persecuted, and followed, and in danger of violent abduction by these same men—men of wealth and position, and utterly unscrupulous.

“Under these circumstances she resolved to make her escape from the meshes of the net in which, by some misfortune, she was entangled. For you must understand, through some act of imprudence on her part, they claim to have the strict law on their side, and if they can once seize her person by violence they believe that the law would decide in their favour.

“I know not the nature of this man’s claim, whether it is that of guardian, father, brother, or what. I do know that any man who attempts by rude violence to coerce a woman is unworthy of the name.

“You have heard me read her letter. I for one mean to follow those who follow her—to persecute her persecutors, so to speak: to do battle with her enemies, and see her safely *en route* at least for France, where she will be, she says, safe.

“ That is all. Let every one who is with me, and will join in the adventure, hold up his hand.”

Every hand was held up, and in two minutes the ten cabs were rattling along to the Victoria Station.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE SPECIAL TRAIN—SIXTY MILES AN HOUR!

MAUDE, after dispatching the missive to Roland Dane, was in a painful state of trepidation. She felt half ashamed of what she had done, and yet anxious and hopeful as to the result."

"Surely," she said to herself, "I have not thus humbled myself by sueing for his help in vain. Ah! no. I think not."

Nevertheless, she waited with nervous impatience for the return of her messenger—more anxious for that, indeed, than for the special train, to see about which Ellen Carmichael left her every five minutes or so.

It seemed that James, Mrs. Wyndham's footman, had been gone hours, when at last he returned.

She noticed that he looked bewildered and confused, as well he might, considering the extraordinary scene of which he had been a witness.

She strove to be calm and appear unmoved, but could not help her voice trembling a little.

"Well, James, you delivered my note?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Any reply?"

"Well, my lady, I did not wait. There was such a to-do, I didn't like to."

"What do you mean? I don't understand you. You saw the gentleman himself, I hope."

"Yes, my lady, I saw him, and forty or fifty more. I thought they were all mad together."

The forty or fifty was of course an exaggeration, but it did not seem to Maude.

"Forty or fifty, and all mad together! Whatever do you mean? Why, James, it is you must be mad or tipsy," she said, petulantly, sorry the next moment.

"Well, my lady," said James, an old and tried servant, nettled at being charged with being tipsy, "I heard a tremendous row when I got to the hotel; then I was told to go upstairs, and the waiter grinned when he showed me the way. I got to the door of a large long room, and stood there and looked on a bit. The tables were smashed to pieces, and the chairs and everything in the room; and dancing and shouting among broken glass and the wreck of the tables and chairs were fifty or sixty gentlemen (James increased the number this time); most of them were stripped to their shirts and trousers; many of them had cut faces and heads, and were marked with blood. All seemed stark staring mad. Some one was playing the fife, and they were all dancing to the tune. The landlord seemed frightened; everybody, and myself too, were frightened at such a to-do. Presently they stopped, and there was a little quiet, and I went in the room to do my errand, and got away again as soon as I could, I can tell you, my lady."

"You saw the gentleman?"

“Yes, my lady, I saw him, and gave him the letter.”

“He was not one among these madmen dancing, I hope?”

“He was, my lady. I went into the room and called out ‘Is there a gentleman here named Roland Dame?’ ‘That’s my name,’ he said, and came to me. He was in his shirt sleeves, but covered with dust, and with blood running from a cut or scratch on his forehead. He took the letter, asked me where I brought it from, and then I came away, and glad of it too, I can tell you, my lady.”

James seemed quite hurt at having to mingle among such disreputable company, if only to deliver a letter.

“It is no matter,” she said, with a deep sigh; “be kind enough to go and find Miss Carmichael, and send her to me.”

This report of James, Mrs. Wyndham’s old and faithful servant, which she knew must be true in the main, filled her with shame, mortification, and despair. To think she should have despatched an appealing letter to one of a number of drunken revellers.

That *she*—the high-born and proud Lady Maude—should have sent her miniature and an imploring letter—both, doubtless, to furnish food for merriment—to be displayed and boasted over to his dissipated drunken companions.

The thought was torture to her proud sensitive spirit, and she bitterly regretted having yielded to the advice of Ellen Carmichael, and sent the letter at all.

But Ellen was not of the same opinion. She was stronger minded than Lady Maude, and had seen more of the world. To her there was nothing so terribly shocking in the idea of young men overstepping the bounds a little occasionally.

“My dear lady,” she said, “it does not at all follow that because James happened to witness a rather strange scene that the gentleman to whom you sent was to blame; or that he would, as you seem to fancy, make a joke and a boast of your letter to him. My experience of men is this, that none who are worthy of the name, are proof against the seductions of company and good fellowship. Depend upon it, despite James’s report and your opinion, that Mr. Dane will not neglect your appeal to him for help.”

“I hope he will, I hope he will! I do not wish to see him—to be indebted to him for further assistance. Ah! The very thought of seeing him—half tipsy—with blood-shot eyes and flushed face. Better have no champion at all than such a one.”

So said Maude, in the bitterness of her heart, and ceased not to reproach herself until it was time to enter the special train which was to take them to Dover.

There was only one first-class carriage attached to the engine, and into the hinder compartment of this the two girls took their places.

“You look out from one window, Lady Maude,” said Ellen, “while I will do the same from the other. If we are followed, it is possible we may catch a glimpse of your persecutors. It is pretty

certain that, if they mean pursuit, they are in the immediate neighbourhood."

Presently the train glided from the station; and Maude, withdrawing her pale face, pulled up the window, and, leaning back in the carriage, gave way to gloomy thought; nor would she suffer Ellen to cheer her spirits, or buoy her up with hope.

The train rattled along at great speed, and one might have fancied that the consciousness of this would have cheered her up; for every mile they travelled brought them nearer to Dover, and farther from her enemies.

About thirty miles from London the train stopped in order to water the engine, and Maude, listening, heard, with shuddering terror, the following conversation. A man, who seemed to be the station-master, came up alongside the engine, and addressed the driver—

"Keep her going, Jack: don't spare coals. We've heard by telegraph that there's another special only about a quarter of an hour behind you."

"What's the engine?" asked the driver.

"I don't know for certain—the Bellerophon very likely."

"Then if it's the Bellerophon, and Bob Randals is driving her, she'll overhaul us. She'll be in Dover close behind us. This old cripple of a thing can't race the Bellerophon."

"Well, do the best you can. I suppose you can get fifty-five out of her."

"As much as I can; and the Bellerophon's good for seventy at a pinch," growled the engine-driver.

Ellen Carmichael also heard this conversation, and

the two girls looked in each other's faces with blank dismay.

Another special close behind them! Ellen well knew the meaning of that, who had engaged it, and whom it bore in swift pursuit.

Lady Maude was almost overwhelmed. The dismay so plainly depicted in Ellen's face convinced her that it was almost a certainty that their enemies were close on the track.

"I feared so," sighed Ellen Carmichael. "It was but a *ruse* to deceive me, their getting into a cab, and telling the man to drive to Paddington."

"There is no doubt, then, you think, that they are in pursuit with another train?"

"I fear there can be no doubt; I saw them come out of the station-master's office. Doubtless there they have arranged for the train to follow us. However, all is not lost yet. We must arrive first, if it is only by a minute or so."

Before long the train again stopped, in order that a goods train might be shunted out of the way. Again Maude overheard a conversation between a railway official at the station and the engine-driver.

"Here's a pretty go, Jack. You know there's another special behind you?"

"Yes, I know that; the Bellerophon's the engine I reckon. I can't keep ahead of her, that's a certainty. Bob Randals will have to slacken, or else he'll run into me."

"Ay; but that ain't all;—there's a runaway engine—at least, that's what I make out of it. They've

been telegraphing like mad from London to keep the line clear, and now they're communicating with Dover. There's something up, that's quite certain."

A runaway engine! Why, there wasn't one with steam up when I left London. Yes, there was, now I think of it. The Pluto, goods engine broke down, and they were getting up steam in the Cyclops to take the midnight goods train down. If it's the Cyclops broke loose, Bob Randals will have to look sharp, or she'll smash into him. A wonderful long run the Cyclops can make, with very little steam! I used to drive her once. But she can't run more than ten miles full speed, she's bound to slacken then, and stop under twenty."

"Ay, but from what I gather from the station-master and telegraph-clerk—there's somebody on the engine; somebody's run away with her."

"Oh! gammon; tell that to the marines. How can that be? Why, her driver ain't the man to play any foolish jokes o' that kind I know."

"Well, I've told you all I know about it. There's something queer going on, I can tell you, and it's about a runaway engine. But there you are—green lights—up-rails clear. Go ahead. Good night."

"Porter, porter," cried Maude, who had heard all this conversation, the latter part of which was quite¹ unintelligible to her—as, indeed, it was to the driver.

"Yes, ma'am," said that person, coming to the carriage-window.

"Tell the engine-driver I want to speak to him for a moment."

“Yes, ma’am,” the man said, touching his cap; and then went to the driver just as the latter was on the point of starting his engine.

“Here, Jack, one of the ladies wants to speak to you; I expect she’s frightened at the carriage shaking, and wants you to go slow.”

“A likely thing,” growled the driver as he got off his engine and went to the carriage-window; “a likely thing, and have Bob Randals smashing into me behind.”

But he was much mistaken in his surmise.

Maude, with evident agitation, said—

“Are you going as fast as you can, I mean have you been doing so?”

“Yes, ma’am, pretty well; couldn’t get much more out o’ this old engine.”

“But you could make it go faster?”

“Well, yes, ma’am, by burning a heap more coal I dare say I could get a few more turns out o’ the wheels a minute.”

“Then for Heaven’s sake do so; for my sake do so; I will give you twenty sovereigns if you will make the engine go as fast as possible—at the very highest speed.”

“Twenty sovereigns!”

“Yes, twenty sovereigns.”

“Twenty sovereigns,” the man repeated, bewildered at the promise of such a sum.

“Yes, I have good reason; there is another special train behind us.”

“Yes, the Bellerophon, I reckon, with Bob Randals driving.”

“I wish to arrive at Dover as long before the other train as possible; that is my reason. So pray, my good man, do your best.”

“All right, ma’am,” cried the driver, as he jumped on his engine; “I understand—I won’t spare coal or steam. I’ll make the old devil travel if ever she did.”

And then with a whistle and shriek the engine moved out of the station with its single carriage—quickly gathering speed, rushed on through the darkness at the rate of over sixty miles an hour, for the driver kept his word, and made a furious fire in the furnace, totally regardless of economy of coal. The carriage oscillated to and fro so violently that under other circumstances Maude would have been alarmed. But as it was, she leaned back in the carriage, and ever and anon murmured “faster, faster,”—as though her words would be heard.



THE DIAMOND CROSS,

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECOND SPECIAL TRAIN—SEVENTY MILES AN HOUR!

Less than a quarter of an hour after the departure of the first special from the last station, the telegraph wires announced the approach of the second, and it dashed through at full speed without stopping. So great was the pace at which it was going, that it was obvious it must overhaul the first train before it reached Dover. The pace was nearer seventy miles than sixty an hour; and the porters and station-master gazed aghast as the roaring iron monster thundered by.

There were two carriages—one a first, the other a second class. In the second class were half-a-dozen powerful-looking men in plain clothes, and an adept might have told at a glance that they were constables.

In the first-class carriage, nearest the engine, were three men—Sir Robert Barclay, Lord Algernon, and John Carmichael.

Sir Robert was smoking and taking occasional sips of brandy. John Carmichael was gazing moodily out through the window at the darkness; while Lord Algernon, under the carriage lamp, was reading *Bell's Life*.

“Rattling good pace this,” said Sir Robert, looking out of window as they passed the station like a flash.

“Yes, we shan’t be much behind our quarry, I fancy,” replied Lord Algernon, and then, seemingly deeply interested, went on reading.

“What the devil have you got there that seems to interest you so?” said Sir Robert, testily; “I suppose you’re amusing your foolish head by trying to pick out the winner of some race or other—you give it up, Algernon, you haven’t got brains enough—you’re too big a fool.”

“Frank,—it happens though on the present occasion that you are quite mistaken; what I was reading was an advertisement. It strikes me it would suit you.”

“What’s the advertisement?”

“Yatch for sale.”

“Yatch be d——d, you infernal fool you. I’ve got something else to think about than yachts.”

“It’s you that are the fool, Sir Robert,” replied Algernon, a slight flush of anger rising to his cheek at the proud insolent way in which the baronet addressed him—“It’s you who are foolish in not waiting and listening to what I had to say.”

“Well, then,” said Sir Robert, surlily, “blaze away, go a-head; let me hear what bright idea has come into your addle-head.”

Sir Robert, for some reason or other, was in a savage temper, and did not hesitate in venting it upon his associate in villainy. The latter judged it best to take no notice as he had his object to gain in the shape of £50,000—the price of his sister.

“ You were saying just after we started that you foresaw a great deal of difficulty in getting her to the North, as you hadn’t the private carriage, with the spring iron shutter, which you had expressly prepared.”

“ Yes, very well.”

“ Well, then, suppose instead of having to take her forcibly all through England by rail, or hire a conveyance at all events part of the way—I say, supposing you had a yacht lying in Dover Harbour all ready for sea.”

“ What the devil’s the good of supposing that when I have nothing of the kind?”

“ Never mind, let me finish ; I say, supposing you had such a yacht, would it not be an excellent plan to put her on board and take her to Scotland by sea ? No fear of escape or rescue there, you know.”

“ Why, yes ; but, I repeat, what the devil’s the good of supposing what is not the fact ? I haven’t a yacht in Dover Harbour, that’s quite certain.”

“ True enough. But there is no reason whatever why you shouldn’t have one.”

“ What the devil do you mean ?”

“ I will tell you. I will read you the advertisement :

‘ For Sale.—The schooner yacht, *Flying Fish*, now lying in Dover Harbour, with sails, stores, and all ready for sea. Price £1,000. A responsible person can obtain immediate possession for £250 cash. Apply to Jackson & Graham, Shipping Agents, Dover.’

“Now I want to know what there is to prevent you from buying the *Flying Fish*. You have over a thousand pounds in ready money, and in my opinion £250 would be well spent in the purchase.”

“I don’t know but what you are right, Algernon,” said Sir Robert; “I’ll think of it. It will be a pleasant thing to get the girl on board. But what about these constable fellows we’ve got with us? Isn’t there a chance that they will want to see the prisoner to London, or at all events taken before a magistrate?”

“Leave it to me; I’ll settle it so that they shall go off quite satisfied. Hand me over £300 and I’ll guarantee it—buy the yacht on my own hook, and see it all right.”

Sir Robert Barclay took out his pocket-book and gave the other two one hundred pound notes, one fifty, and five tens.

“There you are,” he said, quickly lighting a cigar; “see that you keep your word.”

“Of course,” said Lord Algernon, “I shan’t attempt it till we’re quite certain of Maude.”

As he spoke he folded up the bank notes and placed them in his waistcoat-pocket.

John Carmichael watched him with greedy eyes, and Sir Robert noting it, said in his usual taunting insolent manner—

“You’re thinking how you’ll like to have those notes in your pocket instead of that of my friend, my fine fellow. You can have notes to a larger amount when you have done your work; if you show the white feather at the last moment you won’t get

a rap, and, what is more, I'll do my best to get you penal servitude."

John Carmichael had turned white with mingled fear and rage. Sir Robert always insolent and contemptuous in his language towards him, had lately grown more so—soured by disappointment and suspense—until Lord Algernon, despite his pusillanimity almost rebelled at the deliberate insult put upon him. The baronet smoked in silence for some time, to all appearance totally oblivious or careless as to what his companion might feel.

Presently the harsh discordant scream of the steam-whistle sounded, and was followed by the grating and grinding of the wheels as the break was applied.

"What the devil is up, now?" said Sir Robert. "We're slackening speed. Put your head out of the window and see, Algernon."

The latter, whose wrath had somewhat cooled down, did so, and looked ahead.

"I can see red lights ahead—a station, I suppose, and we're going to stop—for water or something, I suppose."

"How many more times, I wonder?" growled Sir Robert—"these cursed stoppages will ruin us. She'll get to Dover before us in the other train, and be off."

For a couple of minutes the train pulled-up alongside the platform of a small country station. Several porters, clerks, and other railway officials, all apparently in a great state of excitement, ran along the platform by the side of the engine, keeping pace

with it before it stopped, and where shouting out to the driver. Sir Robert and his companion could catch a few words—"Telegraph—runaway engine—can't stop her—only two stations behind—shunting-place—go ahead."

"What's all this fuss about?" asked the baronet, putting his head out of the window. "Where's the station master?"

"Here, sir."

"Well, what's all this about?"

"Indeed, sir, I hardly know. They've telegraphed down the line that there's a runaway engine and tender crowded with men, coming along behind. It seems bad not one of the company's officials up the line know anything about it."

"The devil. Where does it come from?"

"It must have started from London, sir, shortly after your train, by what I can gather from the telegraph."

"And who can the men be, if they're not the company's people."

"Heaven only knows, sir. The telegraph says—

Runaway engine crowded with men—can't stop her—pays no attention to signals. Stop the special train, and shunt, if it can be done quickly, at your station; if not, send it on to the next station where it can shunt and let engine go by. Keep red lights up, and good look out. Runaway engine about fifteen miles behind second special.

"The devil," cried Sir Robert. "Then with this delay she'll soon be close on to us."

THE DIAMOND CROSS,

“Yes, sir,” Then to the driver—“All right. Go ahead full speed, and don’t stop at any station till you see a red light, which will mean that you can shunt and let the engine by.”

The train moved off slowly; and, after a few snorts and puffs, commenced to gather way. But scarcely had it proceeded two hundred yards, when a shout was heard from the porter and others on the platform; and, looking out at the carriage window Sir Robert and Lord Algernon could discern in the distance behind them two white lights, close together, and on the same level.

“Fire up, Bob!” shouted the driver to his stoker. “Here comes the runaway; if we don’t make steam fast, she’ll be into us.”

The baronet heard these words, and at once comprehended the instructions. The train was not yet going at speed, though each instant it went faster, and there was a very great chance of the runaway engine and tender dashing into them from behind.

As it happened, however, the engine of the special—the Bellerophon—was a large and powerful one, and, with its light load, gained impetus rapidly; so that, though the two gleaming lights of the other engine approached nearer and nearer every moment, it was not at the same rapid rate. The porters and others assembled at the small stations stood on the platform, and looked on in much awe and wonder at the strange scene.

The red lights of the last carriage of the special growing smaller and smaller as the train shot ahead, and the white lights and glare from the furnace-fire

of the runaway lessening each moment, more distinct as the engine came roaring along, unencumbered by anything save the tender.

And in less than a minute after the special had moved away, the engine swept by with a roaring rush, like a blast of tempest wind.

But in that moment, the wondering officials could discern, by the glare of the furnace-fire (the door of which was open, in order that more coals might be heaped on), that the platform of the engine was crowded with men, and that others were also seated and clinging in various positions about the tender.

The faces and hands of nearly all were black and grimed with coal and smoke, and their eyes seemed to shine with supernatural lustre in the furnace light.

The porters and others looked on with blank amazement in each other's faces; and, as this extraordinary apparition swept by, utterly heedless of the red lights, the danger signals, it was fully a minute before any one spoke.

"Oh, Lord!" cried the station-master. "Wait; there'll be a smash. She's going a good seventy miles an hour, and will be slap into the special in a few minutes."

"The Bellerophon's a good engine," said one of the porters; "and Bob Randals knows how to make her travel."

The station-master looked at him seriously, a pitying expression on his face.

"Tom you're a very decent, hard-working fellow: but you're a fool."

“How’s that, sir?”

“Well, do you think he can drive against demons ghosts, spirits, from another world?”

“Ghosts, sir!—demons!”

“Yes; that’s what’s the matter. This is something supernatural, mark my words. Did you notice their fiery, gleaming eyes, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” said Tom, with awe; “but it didn’t strike me they were ghosts.”

“Why, what else could they be? They’re not the company’s servants I suppose,”

“No, sir, that I’ll be sure they ain’t.”

“Then what else can they be but ghosts or devils?” reiterated the official, in a tone of triumph. “That’s what’s the matter, Tom; and there’ll be a tremendous smash presently, mark my words.”

Meanwhile the engine, with its crew of demons or ghosts, was rushing on through the darkness at a pace considerably over a mile a minute.

Sir Robert Barclay, Lord Algernon, and John Carmichael were all greatly excited.

The white lights of the engine behind could be plainly seen now, and it was obvious it was fast gaining on them.

Presently the face of a man was seen at the window from which Sir Robert had just withdrawn his head—a face, flushed, grimed with smoke and coal-dust—a hard, weather-beaten face—no other than that of Bob Randals, the engine-driver.

“Beg pardon, sir,” he said, in a very loud voice “I’ve come to tell you that we shall be run into directly—a regular smash it’ll be, I expect.”

Pleasant information, certainly! and two of the three in the carriage felt terribly alarmed.

To do the baronet justice, he did not lose his nerve at all; but Lord Algernon and John Carmichael both turned deadly pale.

"A smash!—run into!—a railway accident! Goodness gracious! can't you stop the engine?" cried the former.

The driver looked at him with pitying contempt.

"Yes, I could stop the engine, sure enough," he replied; "but it would be certain death. The faster we go, the less the shock will be—though it's pretty certain to throw both off the rails."

"Can't you go faster," asked the baronet, "and so avoid this infernal runaway engine?"

"Yes, sir; I could get a few more turns out of her."

"D—n it all then do so," cried the baronet. "I'll give you ten pounds to put on full steam."

"Just put your face out o' window, and look ahead," said the driver.

Sir Robert did so.

"Well, sir, what do you see?"

"A red light."

"That's the other special, sir. Se's only half a mile ahead, and this engine's about three-quarters behind. So you see, sir, we're jammed between the two of 'em. If I go ahead faster, I shall smash into t'other special; if I slacken, the engine will be slap into us."

Sir Robert did not lose either nerve or self-possession.

"It seems, then," he said, "that we're pretty well certain to have a smash, one way or the other?"

"Yes, sir, I'm afraid so, unles the engine behind slacks up. You see. they daren't stop ahead—I mean the other special—on account of us being behind ; and we daren't slackan by reason of that mad engine."

At this instant the train thundered past a station, which seemed to vanish in the twinkling of an eye.

There was only a rattle and a flash of light as the train swept by, and the next moment was rushing as into darkness.

"We ought to have shunted here, sir ; they were all ready for us—a clear siding. I saw it as I ran by ; but of course we can't, with that runaway devil close behind us."

And then the train dashed into the yawning mouth of a tunnel.

"Look out behind you now, sir," said the driver, still standing on the footboard of the carriage, along which he had made his way to warn his passengers of their danger, leaving his stoker in charge of the engine—no difficult task, as all he had to do was to keep the fire up.

Sir Robert Barclay did as he was bidden, and an exclamation of surprise broke from him.

It was indeed a singular sight he beheld. At the moment he looked out, the engine had just entered the tunnel, and the glare from the furnace being reflected from the roof and wall enabled him to discern the iron monster with the tender, on which

and on the platform, clustered like bees, he saw a number of men, whose faces gleamed red and ghostly by the light of the furnace. The engine could not have been less than half a mile behind, and yet it appeared to be quite close.

“By——it’s into us,” cried Sir Robert; “look out, you fellows,” he cried, shouting to Lord Algernon and John Carmichael, “we’re all going to immortal smash together in a moment or two.”

There was no trace of fear in his voice. He seemed to speak more in mockery to arouse the terror of the others than with any other object; and he watched the pale ghastly face of Lord Algernon and the terror-stricken countenance of John Carmichael with a smile of grim satisfaction.

“Dirty cowards,” he muttered to himself, “each of them is willing and ready to sell his sister, and yet neither have the pluck to face death like men.”

“She will be into us in about seven minutes, sir,” shouted the driver in his ear, “at this rate—that is, if they don’t slacken; and it seems they won’t, or, perhaps, can’t.”

“Well, then,” replied Sir Robert, “go ahead.”

“Then we shall run into the other special. It don’t make much difference to me, sir:—just as you like,” said the engine-driver, who, though he fully appreciated the imminent danger, did not give way to abject terror. “I think there’s bound to be a smash. It’s your train; so you can have your choice. If I slacken, the engine will be right into us at once; if I go ahead, we shall slap into the first special.”

"Then slap into the first!" shouted Sir Robert.

In an under tone he muttered, "She thinks to escape me, As there must be a smash, we'll all go to blazes together. The engine coming up behind on to the two trains will almost settle everybody's business on this train—and the other, too, I fancy."

The driver left, and, crawling along the footboard as before, regained his engine.

Scarcely had he done so than Sir Robert knew, by the oscillations of the carriage becoming more violent, that they were going at increased speed.

"Now, then, you fellows, look out!" he cried; "There's a grand smash going to come off directly: say your prayers and confess your sins. We shall run into the train in front directly; and you two beauties will have the honour and glory of dying with your sisters. A nice pair of scoundrels, both of you! I wonder what Maude and Ellen will say to the pair of you when you meet all together in kingdom come! Ha! ha! ha! Why, I do believe they'll cut you, you poor miserable devils! Look out!—hark! there's a whistle. It's all up! Oh! you confounded cowards! Ha! ha! ha!"

The baronet laughed demoniacally, feeling a savage pleasure in witnessing the abject terror of the other two, who both of them fully understood their danger.

By this time the constables and others whose services Sir Robert had secured in the second-class carriage were awake to the true state of affairs, the engine-driver informing them, in a few words, as he passed their compartment, that there was about to be a collision—a terrible accident.

Their excitement of course was great; and leaning with their bodies half out of the windows, they shouted and waved their arms frantically, hoping either to stop the mad career of the pursuing engine or by some means or other to get the train ahead to move out of their way.

Any such hope, however, was quite vain, for the foremost of the two trains had the weakest engine, while the solitary engine in rear of all, with only a tender to draw, was capable of the greatest speed. Hence, then, unless the last one slackened, a smash was inevitable.

The roar and rattle of the front train was now plainly to be heard, in addition to the echoing thunder of the runaway engine behind.

The scene was one of terrible grandeur. Sir Robert Barclay, looking from the carriage window, could make out the red lights of the train ahead and the white lights and furnace flare of the engine behind. The shouts of the men in the second-class carriage swelled the din, and, to increase it, there was heard an occasional yell or shout from the rear. Nearer and nearer came the two trains, and now the pale frightened faces of the Lady Maude and Ellen Carmichael can be seen for an instant protruded from the carriage window.

Maude, terrified at the thought of successful pursuit, cries out aloud to the driver of her train—“Faster! faster! for the love of heaven, faster!”

Sir Robert Barclay, tying a handkerchief around the lower part of his face, for the double purpose of concealment and to guard against the sparks flying

from the engine, looks out ahead, and sees more than once the pale frightened face of his intended victim, now—although she knows it not—in imminent danger of escape from him for ever by a violent death.

Even at that terrible time, when in all probability a few moments more would witness a terrible scene of smashed carriages, splintered woodwork, and mangled human forms—when the shrieks of the wounded and dying might soon be expected to ring forth clear and piercing in the dark tunnel—even Sir Robert, his face gleaming like that of a demon in the glare of engine, furnace, and the red lights of the train in front—even then he did not lose his self-possession, nor was the expression of insolent scorn and bravado absent from his face; even at that terrible time he could gloat over the terrors of his victim.

Nevertheless he did not wish ~~him~~ to recognize himself, for though fully prepared for the worst, in the shape of a terrible accident, he yet thought there was a chance, not only of escape, but of finally getting Maude into his power.

He knew that they were now rapidly nearing Dover, and thought it probable that if by good fortune an accident were to be avoided, or if it were not a very disastrous one, that the two girls would still press on to what they looked forward as a haven of safety—the saloon of the mail packet.

“If I live through the smash, and she does,” he muttered between his teeth, “by——, I’ll get her in my power!”

At this moment a loud shout rang on the air, as the two trains dashed out from the tunnel close together, followed by the engine.

The shout came from behind, and Sir Robert, looking back, beheld, by the dark glare of the furnace, a lot of people on the engine and tender, raising their hands and gesticulating like madmen. He could just make out their figures, but by the uncertain thickening light of the furnace, could not discover their faces.

“A lot of the stokers and firemen gone stark mad, I should say. I suppose they must have started off with the engine on a drunken frolic. I have heard of such things in America.”

These were his thoughts as he looked at the engine thundering along behind them, keeping about the same relative distance. He could think of no other solution for the mystery, although one, just for a second, flashed across his mind.

“Can it possibly be that this engine and its load are in pursuit of me, as I am of Maude?”

He dismissed it, however, almost immediately, as too absurd, and now that the climax was evidently rapidly approaching, he coolly began to make his preparations. He first of all, with his stick, smashed all the glass out of the window.

“You see, my friends, in a railway collision, the thick window glass is apt to do damage. I would advise you to do the same on your side—that is, if you’ve got energy enough left.”

Neither John Carmichael nor Lord Algernon however, paid any heed to this.

Next Sir Robert Barclay began very methodically to pull up the cushions from the seats and make himself a barricade. This done, he wrapped a railway rug round the upper part of his body, and held his overcoat in readiness to throw over his face when the smash came. By these precautions he hoped to escape serious injury. At all events, he considered it gave him a better chance.

His preparations completed, he again looked forth from the window. The train was dashing along at a great pace, and was at this moment in a narrow cutting, with high steep banks on either side.

“Better have the smash here than on a bridge,” muttered the baronet. “I wish it would come. This suspense is a nuisance.”

He was by nature a bad, bold man, but even his stout spirit quailed at the thought that the next moment he might be a helpless mass of humanity—a mangled, bleeding corpse, crushed under the *debris* of the broken train.

Bang! crash! A great shock, instantly succeeded by the splintering of wood and the clang of metal, as the second train dashed into the first.

Every one was thrown from his feet, Sir Robert coming against his barricade of cushions.

A shriek of pain and terror escaped from the pallid lips of Lord Algernon, as he was thrown violently against the window, cutting his face in several places. John Carmichael was also hurt by the first concussion while Sir Robert alone escaped unscratched.

However, he well knew that the worst was not over—the train was not thrown off the line by running

into the special ahead, but instantly its speed was deadened by the shock.

And there was the runaway engine tearing along full speed behind.

In a few seconds the other shock came. A terrible crash!—a groaning of timber and a heaving up and down of the carriages; then a rude jolting and bumping, followed by the rushing and roaring of steam, the clanking of machinery, and yells, shouts, and other noises, making up altogether a most infernal din.

After swaying to and fro violently for a second or so, the carriage in which were the trio toppled over, and fell violently on its side. The shock was terrible, and, despite his barricade of cushions, was too much for the baronet.

John Carmichael and Lord Algernon were flung heavily all in a heap over him, and he laid stunned and senseless in a corner of the overturned carriage



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWENTY CAPTAINS CAPTURE AN ENGINE.

IN order to explain the extraordinary scene culminating in the catastrophe we have described, it is necessary to return to the Twenty Captains.

We left them bound in all haste for Victoria station, in order, at the instance of Roland Dane, to assist and rescue the mysterious lady from her persecutors.

When the cabs drove up at the station all was quiet. A solitary porter was outside, and was just about closing the doors which led to the platform.

It struck Roland Dane—who, as having proposed the adventure, was left to conduct it—that it would be bad policy for such a crowd of them to take the station by storm, as it were.

So he rapidly passed the word round to the rest to wait outside the big gates, while he and Captain O'Rourke went into the station to reconnoitre.

The first thing was to tip the porter half-a-crown, and learn the state of affairs.

In reply to his question, the man said that two ladies had gone off in a special train for Dover about half an hour before.

“Gone off in a special train?”

“Yes, sir ; and that ain’t the most curious part of it. The special hadn’t been ordered long, when two gentlemen comes up in a cab, and orders another train to be got ready to follow the first.”

“Describe the ladies.”

The porter did so in such a way as to convince Roland Dane that it was Maude herself, and some one else—a female friend probably.

“And now about the gentlemen. What were they like ?” asked Roland, eagerly.

“Well, sir, I ain’t good at describing gentlemen ; but I can tell you one thing, that the ladies seemed terribly frightened of them. I overheard a few words which the slightest and fairest of the young women said to the other. Ah! she was an angel to look at, and I felt quite sorry for her ?”

“What did she say ?”

“She said to the other one, clasping her hands and looking as pitiful as an angel, ‘All is lost ; they are on our track ; they will follow us ; I have no one in the world to help me.’”

“Ah !” cried Roland, eagerly ; “but she shall find that she’s not so utterly unprotected. But go on, tell us what happened next.”

“Well, then, the gentlemen sent to the station-master, and ordered another special to follow as sharp as possible after this one. One of the young women kept a sharp eye—watched ‘em like a cat. She didn’t seem so frightened either, though she way very pale and quiet. Well, then, one of the two gentlemen goes off in a cab, and comes back again by-and-by with some more—not gentlemen, but rough

looking chaps. One o' my mates says he knowed one of 'em, a detective police-officer."

"A detective! Then probably some of the others were also officers?"

"Well, sir, they all had that cut about them, but I can't say myself."

"Well, what next?"

"Why then, sir, they hurried up the train—and there she is now just going out of the station."

"Where?" cried Roland.

The man pointed down the now dark deserted platform, where at the extreme end two carriages and an engine were standing.

"They'll be off in a few minutes, sir. I think they're all but ready now."

"Are the passengers—the two gentlemen who engaged the special, and the others—in the train?"

"Yes; been there this five minutes, and hallooing every now and again to hurry up; and in a desperate hurry surely one of 'em seems."

"And you are sure that they're going in pursuit of the two ladies, who left in the first special?"

"Certain—sure."

Roland Dane thought for a few moments, and then rapidly consulted with Captain O'Rourke.

We must have another special, and follow."

"Right you are, my boy," exclaimed the gallant captain, who entered heart and soul into the adventure.

"Where's the station-master?" asked Dane, hurriedly.

"He's just making up the books, and always locks

himself in for that. I don't think you can see him to-night ; he'll be off in a few minutes more."

"Oh, but you can manage," cried our friend, who was determined not to be beaten.

The tip of another half-crown had considerable influence with the porter.

"I'll try, sir," he said. "What might your business be with him ?"

Another special to follow instantly in pursuit."

"Another special, sir!" cried the man in the utmost astonishment. "I don't think it's possible."

Well might he feel and look surprised ; for such a thing as three specials ordered on the same night, within an hour or so of each other, had probably never been heard of before on that or any other line.

"Why not possible ?" was the quick interrogatory

"Well, sir, for one reason, because I don't think there's another engine to hand, except the goods engine for the 2.40 train."

"Well, why not that, if it's ready ? Is it so ?"

"Well, yes ; I reckon it is, there or thereabouts, by this time. That's her about a hundred yards or so on—standing in a siding."

"I see it," cried Roland. "Now then for this station-master."

After some trouble, the porter procured an interview with that individual.

But here Roland Dane and O'Rourke met with a flat rebuff.

On no account could he or would he entertain the idea for a moment even.

After trying in vain to shake his resolution, they

walked out from the office on to the platform. As they did so the steam-whistle shrieked, and the special train containing the pursuers and deadly enemies of Lady Maude moved out from the station.

“They’re off,” said Roland, “and we can’t follow.”

O’Rourke gave vent to an Irish imprecation, and the two of them walked slowly on down the platform towards the siding where stood the goods engine.

For no earthly object did they do so but in pure carelessness—Roland brooding deeply over his disappointment.

They got up alongside the great iron horse at which the stoker and driver were busily at work oiling the machinery and firing up for their long night journey; and they could tell by the jet of steam which came roaring from the valve that all was in readiness.

“Confound that infernal station-master!” said Roland, savagely; why couldn’t he let us have the engine, and get another one ready for the goods train?”

O’Rourke started, looked knowing, and winked, while his eye brightened.

Grasping Roland by the arm, he drew him away.

“Splendid!” he cried—“glorious! if we could only do it.”

“What’s glorious?” asked Roland, moodily.

O’Rourke bent his face close down to the other’s ear, and whispered a few words.

Roland Dane started violently, and gave vent to an ejaculation of intense astonishment.

“Is it possible?” he asked, inquiringly.

“It’s possible to make the attempt, anyway, by Japers!” said O’Rourke.

“You are right; we will do it.”

Then both bent their gaze on the engine, and conversed together in a low tone.

Presently Roland Dane went closer to it, and producing a flask of brandy, called to the nearest man—the fireman—

“Have a drain, mate?”

“Don’t mind if I do,” was the reply, after a brief hesitation, and the man commenced to clamber down from the engine.

“Better leave it alone, Sam,” said the other—the engine-driver. “The liquor’s got you into trouble enough already.”

“Oh, you be —, sir!” replied Sam. “I’ve got my notice, and the company can’t do more than give me the sack.”

The engine-driver, a sullen-looking fellow, growled out something, to which, however, Sam paid not the slightest heed, but came up to Roland, and willingly taking the brandy flask, had a good drink thereout.

“What, have you got notice to leave, mate?” Roland said, wishing to draw him into conversation.

“Yes, and little pity.”

“How’s that?”

“It’s a dog’s life; and if a fellow can’t have a drop of drink when he’s done his work, it is hard.”

“Oh, it wasn’t for being drunk on duty, then?”

“Well, you see, sir, I wasn’t to say drunk, or anything like it, but just a little shaky.”

"I see, and some of the officials reported you?"

"It was Big Bob there that drives the engine, d——n him. He's a teetotaler, a psalm-singing cove, and can't bear a chap to have a drop just to warm him, though Lord knows we work hard enough and long enough."

"You and Big Bob the driver, then, are not particularly good friends?"

"It ain't likely."

"Here, take another drain. It's a nasty cold raw night, and you'll want it."

"Thank you, sir," said Sam, willingly taking another pull at the flask.

"Is your's a long journey to night?"

"Dover."

"You've travelled the line often I suppose?"

"More than three months, up and down, every night."

"Do you stop often on the road?"

"Only by signal, or to shunt for the mail to pass."

"You understand the working of the engine I suppose?"

"No, I don't know much about it. My mate—Big Bob, the driver there—is as sulky as a bear, and hates the thought of any one driving anything, or knowing anything, but himself."

Roland thought that if he continued to question the man, he would grow suspicious, so handing him the flask of brandy, now considerably diminished in quantity, he drew O'Rourke on one side, and consulted with him.

“ By the powers, the very thing,” said the Irishman ; “ this is the boy for our purpose.”

Roland now commenced talking to the stoker in a low and confidential tone of voice.

“ Look here, my man ; you’ve got notice to leave your employment ? ”

“ That’s right, sir.”

“ And you don’t know exactly what you’re going to do I suppose ? ”

“ Look about for some other work, I suppose. It’s no use trying to get employment on any other line after you’ve been discharged by one company for drinking. That’s a fixed rule among all of ‘em.”

“ And you don’t feel very kindly disposed towards you’re driver Big Bob ? ”

“ No, d——n him.”

“ Nor the company ? ”

“ Can’t say I do.”

“ You wouldn’t mind playing ‘em a little bit of a trick ? ”

“ Depends upon what it was.”

“ If you were well paid for it ? ”

“ No man objects to money, especially when he’s got empty pockets and a week’s notice.”

“ Then you’re our man.”

“ What’s the game ? ”

Roland Dane lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

“ I’ll tell you. You know there are two specials gone down the line ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ The people in the second are in pursuit of those in the first.”

“Are they though?” said the man, who did not see what the other was driving at.

“Yes; and we want to go in pursuit of the men in the second special.”

“Do you though?” said the stoker.

“Yes, and the station-master, or superintendent, won’t give us a special. He says there isn’t an engine.”

“Then you can’t go.”

“Ah! but that’s just it; there is an engine.”

“Where?”

“Why, there; the one Bob drives.”

“But that’s going to take the goods down.”

“Ah! but we want it to take us down.”

“Well, if the superintendent says it’s all right, I suppose it is. But I don’t see how the goods is to go down. There’s the Ajax broke down, and the Apollo too in the repairing shed. Besides it would take hours to get one of ‘em ready.”

“You don’t understand,” said Roland, speaking rapidly, and with emphasis; “what we want is to take this engine, without the consent of the superintendent, the driver, or any one else, and start off for Dover in pursuit.”

The man started in blank amazement, and for a moment or two was quite incapable of speech.

“Eh! what run away in her?”

“That’s just it. Steam’s up and the line’s clear. Come, what do you say?”

With these words, Roland slapped him on the shoulder; but the man seemed utterly frightened at the audacity of the proposal.

“ Give me some money, O’Rourke,” said Roland in a hurried whisper ; “ the sight of gold and notes will settle the matter.”

The gallant captain quietly produced his pocket-book, and handed Dane fifty pounds—partly in sovereigns, partly in bank-notes.

Roland, chinking the former in his hand, recommenced his attack on the stoker.

“ Come, my lad, what do you say ? Here’s twenty pounds in gold.”

“ It ain’t possible,” said Sam the stoker ; “ Big Bob would not only give an alarm, but would fight like a tiger, and he’s as strong as a bull.”

“ Leave that to us ; we’ll master him.”

“ What, the two of you ?—not so easy as you think, mates.”

“ There are twenty of us within call.”

“ Twenty ! ”

“ Yes, twenty—all sworn to aid and assist each other.”

The man hesitated.

“ Thirty pounds ! ”

No answer.

“ Thirty pounds for just keeping quiet, and helping us passively.”

“ I daren’t do it.”

“ Forty pounds ! ”

“ If I could only see my way so, that I shouldn’t get into trouble about it.” he said dubiously.

“ Now look here, my man ; I tell you what it is we want. Listen, and make up your mind. We want you to give us all the information in your power .

to keep Big Bob's attention distracted while we quietly approach the engine; then, at a given signal we rush up and leap on the platform, you can allow yourself to be overpowered. As for Big Bob, he will be seized and secured in an instant; and then, the engine having been started, he will be gently dropped on the line, and away we shall go—you with us. Here's the money—ten pounds down as earnest, and the rest when you do your part of the work."

Roland Dane pressed the ten sovereigns into the hand of Sam the stoker.

"Well, I'll do it," said the latter firmly, having at last made up his mind.

"Now then about the line," said Roland Dane; "is it clear?"

"Yes; well, off this siding it must be clear, because there's a special just gone down. So long as we keep behind her we can't go wrong."

"And the points from the siding—I mean where the siding joins the line?" asked Dane hurriedly. "Don't forget that."

"I'll go down and see, and if they're closed I'll open them."

Good; and now, which is the best way by which we can approach the engine on the other side—I mean from the road where our friends are?"

"You see that engine shed?" replied the stoker, pointing.

"Yes."

"Well, the other side of that there's houses pulled down, and they've begun the foundations of new

ones. You can get through the empty space, and then you'll see a gap in the wall, where some of it's been pulled down; that will take you right to the line in sight of the engine."

"And now see that the engine doesn't move; make some excuse if the driver wants to move her, or if it's time to start with the luggage-train. We shan't be more than about ten minutes. Keep the driver on the other side of the engine; if possible, get him to dismount."

"All right; I'll do it. I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," was the philosophical remark of Sam the stoker.

"Come on O'Rourke! By Jove, I believe we're all right!" cried Roland. "As you say, it's glorious."

"Stay a moment," said the gallant Captain, pausing under one of the very few and dim gaslights still burning.

"What is it?"

"I want to make an entry of that fifty pounds I gave you. What shall I put it down to, eh? Oh, I know."

And then Captain O'Rourke wrote in his pocket-book, "*Expended on behalf of the association—secret-service money, £50.*"

"That looks businesslike I think," he said.

"Quite so. Come on."

And hurrying along the platform, they rejoined their friends outside.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST ENTERPRISE.

“ You’d better address them, Captain,” said Roland Dane, as they approached the remainder of the Twenty; “ your words will carry more weight than mine.”

“ Just as you like, my bhoy,” replied O’Rourke; “ though, be my soul, you’ve done so well so far that I think you’d better keep on. Be Jabers! the way ye blarneyed that fellow over was a foine sight.”

But Roland adhered to his opinion that it would be better for that gallant captain to do the little bit of speechifying necessary to explain to the boys what was expected of them.

“ I’ll still take the direction of the affair, Captain, if you wish it,” he said; “ subject to your opinion, of course.”

The gallant O’Rourke was flattered at this, and besides highly satisfied with the promptitude and skill of his young companion.

“ You know,” added the other, to clinch the matter, “ you were the originator of the idea—I mean about the engine. But for you I should never have thought of it.”

“ Right you are, my bhoy; and I’ll give ‘em a bit of a spache.”

The spot where the companions in arms, as O'Rourke delighted to call them, were assembled, was a large open space in front of the enclosed station yard, and was now deserted by all save themselves.

“ Gentlemen, and companions-in-arms ! ” said O'Rourke, in a voice loud enough to be audible, but yet not enough so to attract the attention of any passer-by or policeman : “ I’ve a grand enterprise for ye—one that’s worthy of the Twenty Captains. Our object is the laudable and noble one of defending, protecting, and serving lovely woman—‘Woman, lovely woman, oh,’ as the song says. They’re after her in a special train—her ^{en}emies—her deadly enemies ; and we must be after them. But we can’t get a special train. How then, are we to do it ? That’s just what I, Captain O’Rourke, am going to tell you, and to lead you on to glory. We’re going to seize an engine : there’s one all ready ; and we’ve bribed the stoker. It’s the engine that should take the goods train to Dover ; instead of that, it’s going to take our noble selves. Everything is arranged : the stoker is waiting for us ; the line is clear ; we know the way. Come on, boys ! follow me ! Bravo for the Twenty Captains ! ”

The gallant O'Rourke hereupon waved his hat over his head, and taking Roland Dane by the arm, led the way to the building in course of erection pointed out by the stoker.

The abruptness of his address, especially the conclusion thereof, had a good effect.

His own enthusiasm seemed to be infused in the others ; and there being no opportunity for dis-

cussion or questioning, they followed him at once, trooping at the heels of him and Roland like a pack of obedient hounds.

Some among them were, to say the least of it, a good deal staggered by the cool and audacious proposal so abruptly laid before them by their gallant President. Hector M'Nab was delighted with the prospect.

"Hech, man alive," he said to the one next to him, Sextus Miller, F.R.S., &c., the scientific man, "won't it be fun? Run awa' wi' an engine! Did ye ever hear o' sic a thing?"

"Never in my life," replied that gentleman; "and really I must say that the proceeding is most extraordinary and rash—even illegal."

"Come along, man, you're one o' us. It's the President's orders, and we're bound to go in for it."

"A rattling bit of fun we're likely to have," remarked Mr. Richard Rollo (Dare-devil Dick) to John Talbot, the quiet Saxon, and vanquisher of Hector M'Nab.

"Well, yes; but really I must protest. I think it's going a little too far. I must protest against these extreme and violent measures."

"Come along, man alive. Protest as much as you like, so you come on."

And John Talbot, despite his protesting, strode on manfully. There was a light in his eyes, and a look of quiet determination in his face, which plainly said that he would not be the most backward among the lot.

Dr. Columba, the cautious Scotch surgeon, hesi-

tated for a moment or two, but then came on with the rest.

"The mad-brained devils," he said to himself. The fat 'll be in the fire now, and no mistake. However, I suppose I must go along; but I wi explain that it's purely in a professional capacity

Dionysius Thorold, M.A., of Cambridge, also looke a bit grave at first, and was decidedly of opinion that the adventure was assuming an extremely dangerous shape.

Nevertheless, he did not remain behind.

"Well, I'm in for it," he said; "we're all in for it together; and must pull through the best way we can."

Jonathan Johnson—the quiet, mysterious, middle-aged man who said so little—on the contrary, seemed to warm up into something like enthusiasm.

"Seize an engine and take her off—that'll do. I wonder is it a Wolverhampton engine? If it is, I'm all there. I fancy I can drive her a bit."

Full of this thought, he hastened to overtake O'Rourke.

"I say, mister! I can drive if it's wanted."

"Drive what?"

"Engines—I'm used to them,"

"Hurroo!" cried the Irishman; we're in luck's way entirely. Keep close to me, and more power to ye. We'll have her off in a jiffey, and be in Dover in an hour."

The gallant Captain O'Rourke had very evidently greatly miscalculated either the distance to Dover or the speed of steam-engines.

“Pass the word in the rear for every man to swarm up on the engine and tender as best he can—not to lose a moment when the attack’s begun; for we’ll be off directly the driver is made safe.”

Then he led the way, cautiously approaching the engine, and keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the wall.

Roland and he, looking eagerly out ahead, could see nothing of either driver or stoker; although by reason of the bright fire in the furnace there was quite a ruddy glare thrown around.

“Well, I’m d——d,” muttered Captain Carrambole, *alias* Captain Cannon or Cannonball, to his next companion, no other than the Honourable Percy Claverton, whom he had succeeded in eveigling into the enterprise almost against his will; “if this isn’t a pretty game, eh, Claverton? ‘Pon my soul, we’re likely to get into trouble. You haven’t got any relations of yours on the Board of Directors, have you?—because it may be useful.”

“I tell you what it is, Carrambole,” said the Honourable Percy, coming to a stop, “I think I shall go back; I don’t like this sort of thing at all.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Carrambole, who did not dislike the excitement—who could not go on without his wealthy friend, and yet who by no means, for reasons known to various creditors, wished to go back; “nonsense! you can’t go back; see how they’d laugh at you.”

“Let them laugh and be d——d,” rejoined the Honourable Percy, “so that I get clear of the rascallions.”

“But you’ll be the talk of London! They’ll call you coward, and all sort of hard names.”

“Oh, nonsense! this sort of thing is against the law: there’s no bravery in breaking the law of one’s country. Now if it was on the battle-field it would be a different thing, of course. Then, I flatter myself, Percy Claverton would be in the van.”

“And I flatter myself that I know better where he’d be,” muttered Cannon to himself, “a mile or two in the rear, I’d bet a fiver.”

Now Captain Cannon by no means wished to part with these new-made acquaintances of his—if for no other reason, because he had already paid a considerable deposit.

True, as a sensible man he could not but condemn as utterly absurd, mad, and impracticable this idea of seizing an engine, and starting on a wild-goose chase to champion and rescue some unknown lady.

But he was in a desperate position, and really thought he saw his way out of it by joining the Twenty.

He could not spare the Honourable Percy by any means, and therefore resolved to his very utmost to keep him up to the work.

“Look here, Claverton,” he said, “I’m your friend, and I consider myself bound to tell you something.”

“What?”

“Look behind you.”

“Well?” he said, having done so.

“Whom do you see following us?”

“That great mad devil of a Scotchman—Hector M’Nab, I think he calls himself.”

“Well, he’s next to you on purpose—from design.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, let me whisper to you that they’ve got some slight idea, some slight impression, in fact that you’re likely to desert after having duly joined. I heard that Scotch fellow and some others speaking of it the other day; and he—Hector, I mean—swore by all the chiefs in the Highlands, and by I don’t know what else, that if he caught any one trying to desert and betray the fraternity, he’d take him round the body and crush the life out of him. And he added that he once served a grizzly bear that trick. He’s following you now; and if you attempt to make a bolt of it, I feel certain that he’d carry out his threat; for you see there’s no doubt he’s mad enough and strong enough for that, or anything.”

The honourable Percy turned pale at this, which of course was an audacious lie invented for the occasion by Captain Cannon; and glanced nervously over his shoulder at Hector M’Nab, who, innocent of any such thought, was following him at a distance of about ten paces, creeping stealthily along under the shadow of the wall.

“It was only my nonsense,” he said, with a forced laugh; “of course I mean to go on. I’m not one to back out,—you ought to know that.”

“So I do, old fellow. Hush! we’re getting close to the engine now: when this row begins, keep close to me; follow me, and you’ll be all right.”

The exciting moment had now, indeed, all but

AND HOW I WON IT.

come. Foremost of all was O'Rourke, Roland Dane, and Jonathan Johnson, who had said he was able to manage an engine. Close behind them came Samson Slamm, Tally-ho Thompson, and John Talbot, who had protested against it; but who nevertheless, now pressed on. Next were Carrambole and his friend, then Hector M'Nab, and the rest closely following.

Just before reaching the tender, when only about half-a-dozen yards away, O'Rourke and the other two behind stopped for more to come up, so that the attack might be instantly successful.

Then when there were six or seven in the foremost group, Roland Danec rawled stealthily on his hands and knees up to the tender, past it till he was close to the driving wheels of the engine. The roaring of the steam escaping from the valve effectually prevented all chance of their footsteps being heard—the only thing to be guarded against was their being permanently seen.

Roland, after cautiously peeping round the big wheels so as to get a view of the platform before the furnace and machinery where the driver usually stood, found he was there. Roland Dane retreated a few steps, waved his hands to the others, and then called out: "Come on, boys!" The next instant he was alongside the engine, and as quickly mounted it.

"Hallo there—who the devil are you?" cried a gruff voice; and he found himself face to face with Big Bob, the driver, who instantly made a grasp to seize him. Roland, however, not wishing to

trust himself alone in the grip of a man so much more powerful, eluded him by springing on to the coal behind, and in another moment O'Rourke, Jonathan Johnson, and Hector M'Nab, had clambered up.

“Here! help! help! There's murder!” roared the big driver, when he found his engine was being thus invaded by numbers. Then he seized the heavy “maid” or big hammer, used for smashing the lumps of coal, and swinging it round his head aimed a terrible blow at Captain O'Rouke—a blow which must have felled him, and might probably have killed him—but before the blow could descend Roland Dane, who had seen him lift the ponderous weapon, had worked round behind him, and springing on his back, pinioned his arms, and rendered him comparatively powerless.

“One cheer more for Captain O'Rourke!” shouted Roland Dane. Which cheer was almost given vociferously.

“One cheer more for Roland Dane!” cried a voice, clear, but somewhat shrill.

It was that of Jacob Knox, who had hitherto kept very quiet and in the back ground, but now gave way to the catching enthusiasm around, and took advantage of the opportunity to put in a word for his patron and friend.

And then another cheer, half-shout, half-yell, rang out.

And then the big engine sped on her way faster and faster, each second the puffs succeeding one another more and more rapidly till she was thundering along at the rate of fully twenty miles an hour.

CHAPTER XX.

ONWARD !

AMIDST the triumphant excitement and wild uproar it is not altogether wonderful that Roland Dane for a space forgot the responsibilities of his position as leader of the enterprise.

When he bethought himself of the engine-driver, who lay, or rather sat up, bound hand and foot, leaning against the coals, it was too late to put him off the engine without stopping.

For she was now going at such a rattling rate, that to land any person would have been to consign him to a certain and cruel death, and probably the most reckless dare-devil among this crew of mad reprobates would not have done such an act.

Roland moved across to Captain O'Rourke,—not without some difficulty, for the small platform of the engine, usually occupied by only two, now held eight,—and consulted him on the matter.

Both agreed that to pull up now would be foolish and dangerous; and as the man was with them it would be best to carry him on until the first stoppage. The only awkward thing about it was the stoker, Sam, who had been their accomplice. Roland felt bound in honour to see that he was not compromised as he had promised he should not be. So he gave him to understand he wished him to follow, and

then, clambering over the coals, got on to the water-tank of the tender, where they were directly behind the back of Big Bob the driver, who, bound, as he was, of course could not turn ; and as to hearing, the quick roaring puffs of steam, the rushing of the wind and the rattle of the engine, made that all safe.

“Here’s your money,” he said, and handed him the remainder of the promised fifty pounds.

“Thank you, sir.”

“I wanted you to do the stoking, but now that we’ve got to take Big Bob the driver on it won’t do ; so you just keep in the background, and give us any information you can,—as the guest, you know.”

“Yes, sir, that I will, with all my heart. You’re a gentleman, sir—you’re all gentlemen. But, oh, sir ! what a lot of harum-scarum devils. ‘Pon my soul, sir, I half thought it was a joke, although I’d got the ten pounds in my pocket, and was half surprised when you jumped up on the engine.”

“Were you ?” said Roland, laughing.

“I was so, sir. But when all those others clambered up, like a lot o’ wild Indians, I was reg’lar dead licked, sir.”

Roland laughed again, not displeased at the stoker’s undisguised admiration of their successful prowess.

“You’ll excuse me sir, for asking, but I can’t quite make it all out.”

“No ! What can’t you make out ?”

“I can’t make out, sir, who you are, you gentlemen.”

“Why, gentlemen.”

“Yes, sir; but what are you ? For I was thinking you are what they used to call——”

Noticing that he hesitated, Roland asked,—

“ What ? ”

“ Highwaymen, sir ? ”

At this our friend laughed aloud.

“ Am I wrong, sir ? ”

“ Of course you are.”

“ What are you, then ? ”

“ Well, I'll tell you. We're the Twenty Captains.”

“ Oh ! ”

That was all the man said.

The reply, the Twenty Captains, utterly dumbfounded him, as well it might.

“ Now you keep your eye on me,” said Roland, “ and where there is anything particular—any dangerous point to be passed, or anything of that kind—just let me know by holding up your hand, and I'll come to you.”

Roland now clambered back to the platform of the engine, leaving the stoker in the state of the greatest bewilderment.

There were plenty of Volunteers to aid in keeping up the fire ; and Jonathan Johnson apparently quite understanding his business, the engine was now rattling along at the rate of fully fifty miles an hour, and the speed was increasing instead of falling off. As to the noble Twenty, the majority of them were in high spirits and enjoying the fun greatly.

They were assured that the line was clear before them ; for two specials were going on in front, the last of which would not be more than a quarter of an hour ahead.

True there was just a chance that immediately

after the last special rattled by a station, some trucks, or a carriage, or waggon, might be shunted on to the main line ; but the stoker Sam, in answer to a question from Roland, declared that it was most unlikely, and that he had never known or heard of such a thing being done at that hour of the night.

All this was duly communicated to the others by Roland ; one passing the news on to another.

It was not so difficult now that the ear had got accustomed to the noise to make one another hear, and a good deal of talk went on. Even those among their companions who, left to themselves, would have been the last to have originated such an insane enterprise, gave way to the spirit of the affair, and made the best of it.

The rapid motion, the excitement and perhaps also sundry bottles and flasks containing liquids stronger than ginger beer, all tended to keep up the spirits of the engine abductors.

Even Mr. Sextus Miller, F. R. S., &c., seemed to enjoy himself. Seated on a pile of coal on the tender, he gazed tranquilly around—as tranquilly, at least, as he could, for the wind and the violent oscillations of the engine and tender. Perhaps he was speculating on some abtruse philosophical problem as to the relation between momentum and speed, weight and velocity.

The Honourable Percy Claverton was perhaps the only one who was thoroughly miserable.

He was cold in the first place, and had got a very bad position on the edge of the tender ; so was in constant terror of being shaken off.

His friend Captain Carrambole took it very quietly. He just lighted his pipe, and, leaning against the rail of the platform, smoked away complacently.

Presently Hector M'Nab started a song—the with him inevitable “Up with the bonnets of Bonnie “Dundee,” of which he never seemed to weary.

He had scarcely got through the first verse, when on rounding a curve a cry was heard—

“A red light ahead !”

“The danger signal!”

It was not more than a quarter of a mile distant, and should it be a truck in the way, a carriage, or anything of that kind at a station, a smash was inevitable; and though Jonathan Johnson, thoroughly up to his business, at once shut off the steam, it would be impossible to bring the engine to anything like a moderate pace.

“Now, then, make ready all to jump off,” shouted Johnson, “when I give the word. If it's a block there must be a smash, and a jump is our only chance.”

So far as the human voice was concerned, there was a dead silence after this brief speech. But the train roared and rattled on.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CATASTROPHE!

THE intense excitement and suspense of those on the engine and tender may be imagined. In a few seconds the all-important question would be settled, whether there was to be a terrible accident—probably fatal in its consequences to many of them—sure to involve broken bones and other injuries, even though to avoid the collision they jumped off; for the engine had been going at such terrific speed that it could only be checked gradually, though the steam was shut off and the break applied.

Roland Dane was standing close to the driver, who sat leaning against some lumps of coal, moody and silent. He was bound hand and foot, and, of course, had no chance whatever of doing anything to save himself. Roland noticing this, at once took out his sharp clasp knife, and with a few quick cuts severed his bonds.

“There, my man,” he said, “if there is to be a smash, you shall have a chance for your life with the rest of us.”

For the first time since he had been overcome and pinioned he spoke—

“Thank you, sir.”

“You’re welcome; look out for yourself,” said Dane.

The scene on the engine and tender was now a strange and exciting one: everybody struggled for a good place at the edge, from which to jump off when the word should be given, though the effects of that jump and fall would very probable be fatal. Those who were in a favourable position could see the two gleaming red lights right ahead—ominous signal of danger. Hearts beat high, and by the furnace glare none but pale faces and anxious, eager-looking eyes were to be seen; for at such a moment even the bravest might well hold his breath.

Second by second passed, and there was no collision, no cry from the self-appointed engineer of “Jump for your lives.” At last a shout, a welcome shout issued from him.

“All right; it’s the special train.”

Such, indeed, was the fact, going at the tremendous pace they had, and favoured by a stoppage or two of the specials, the Twenty on the abducted engine had already overhauled Sir Robert Barclay.

“Hurrah! three cheers, lads, we’ve caught up with the quarry; three cheers, my jolly boys, we win in a canter!”

The three cheers was given, but not by any means vociferously.

The revulsion of feeling on the part of most of the associates had for the moment damped enthusiasm, and it was only one or two reckless madbrains, such as Hector M’Nab and Dare-devil Dick, who responded vigorously to the challenge of the President.

“Put her along again, Mr. Johnson,” said O’Rourke “the red lights of the train ahead are

almost out of sight. We must keep close to our fox now we're once viewed him in the open."

Thereupon Johnson turned the steam on, and again the engine once more tore along at increased speed ; so that in a few minutes the red lights at the rear of the second special came in sight, and in less than a quarter of an hour the engine was again close behind it. Steam was now shut off again, so that the engine should not smash into the rear of the train ; when the engine and tender went on merely by their acquired momentum, and the steam no longer rushed in hoarse snorts from the funnel ; the motion was much more easy, and there was, besides, less noise, so that conversation was not troublesome.

Roland Dane and O'Rourke, who were standing together on the platform immediately behind Johnson the engineer, were a good deal surprised at being addressed by Mr. Sextus Miller, the man of science.

"I don't know whether you are aware of it, gentlemen," he said, "but the news of this escapade of yours (of ours, I may say, for I don't wish to shirk any share of the responsibility, once having joined, and not by compulsion,) will be flashed to Dover by the telegraph, and when we arrive there it is probable we shall be received by a force of police sufficient to render assistance hopeless. Excuse me for the hint."

"By the piper who played before Moses, he's right," cried O'Rourke "what will we do ? "

Hector M'Nab was standing close by, and at once furnished an answer.

"Pull down the telegraph wires."

After a brief consultation, this was resolved on, and the engine brought to a stand-still.

"You can't leave; you must not get down," said Roland Dane, quickly, to Big Bob the driver whom he had released from his bonds.

He bethought him that this man might hurry off to the nearest station or town, furnish a full description of them, and either cause them to be followed to Dover, or the news sent on.

He was not, however, prepared for the answer.

"Me leave! I'll see you d——d first. I don't get off this engine except by force. I'm her driver—I've drove her this five year—and she's in my charge, though a lot of madmen, as I think, have for a bit took possession of her by violence."

Roland, though a good deal surprised, was not sorry, as he could not doubt that the driver meant what he said, thereby relieving our friends from a considerable embarrassment.

Slow, slower, slower still, then succeeded the grinding of the breaks, and engine and tender were at a stand-still.

Now ensued a brief discussion among some, while others availed themselves of the opportunity of stretching their cramped limbs.

"It strikes me," said Dionysius Thorold, M.A., of Cambridge, "that it's quite useless pulling down the telegraph wires now we've passed many stations, all of which they are on the look-out for us, and signalled and hallooed to us to stop: so of course they've telegraphed down the line. It will be like locking the stable-door when the horse is stolen."

“Nevertheless, my friend,” said Dr. Columba, now speaking for the first time almost, “it will have this good effect—it will prevent them telegraphing any more, and every little helps; most likely, if we keep on our mad career, we’ll pass another station presently. It will stop them telegraphing from there back to London, that we’ve passed.”

There was shrewdness in this remark on the part of the Scotch doctor, but Sir Benjamin Bouncer, to whom he had given offence, and who prided himself on his own acuteness, thought he saw a weak point.

“That’s all very well,” he said, sharply; “but it won’t stop them telegraphing from that station to Dover, or wherever the devil we’re going, that we’ve gone by.”

“That, my young friend, may be obviated, and it will be our own fault if we don’t do so.”

“How can it?”

“Simply by repeating this experiment immediately we pass the next station—before they have time to telegraph.”

This was such an obviously sure preventive that it was hailed with acclamation.

“Bravo, Doctor!” cried O’Rourke, “you’ve the best head of the lot of us.”

“You’ll excuse me, Captain O’Rourke,” said old Calomel, as they delighted to call him; “I speak merely in my professional capacity.”

“Whatever capacity you speak in, you speak d——d well,” cried Dick Rollo; and it’s my opinion you’re a brick.”

“ Well, now then, how shall we get one of these posts down, and that sharp ?” said O’Rourke. “ We’ve no time to lose.”

“ I reckon I can tell you how it can be done more sharper,” said the Yankee, known as the Cannibal.

“ How’s that, my picaninny-eating friend ?” asked O’Rourke, who liked chaffing this strange fish.

“ There’s a piece of strong rope on the tender, with a hook on it ; guess it’s been used for hitching trucks on with.”

“ Well, are we to tie the rope round the post, and all pull on it, like a lot of sailors on the main-top gallant studding topsail jib halyard ?” asked Sir Benjamin Bouncer.

“ No, you ain’t ; so talk about what you know something of.”

“ Well, what is it, Cannibal ?” asked O’Rourke.

“ Just this : hitch one end of the rope on to the post, and the other on to the engine, then start her ; and I’ll warrant the post comes down.”

“ Bravo, Cannibal !”

“ Hurrah !” cried Jonathan Johnson. “ Let’s have the rope.”

The rope was got, and made fast about half-way up the telegraph post, Jack Rutter himself shinning up to do it.

“ Now, then, all on board,” cried O’Rourke. “ Off she goes again.”

Then there was a general scramble for the engine, from which all had got down, save Roland, Jacob Knox, and the secretary, the big Irishman, Darby Kelly, who, by the bye, we have not mentioned lately

but who accompanied his employers and principals, the twenty captains, when they started from the council chamber at the hotel to embark in this mad adventure.

These kept their places in order to make quite sure that Mr. Big Bob the driver did not consider it a favourable opportunity and ride away on his iron horse.

“Now then, hitch on the rope, all fast here,” cried the Cannibal, as he slid down the post and hastened to mount the engine.

Some one did so, and once more the noble President gave the word to proceed, by shouting,

“Let her rip.”

Which Jonathan Johnson the engineer as quickly obeyed; and, with a puff and a clang, off went the ponderous engine. When the rope tightened, it quivered for an instant like an iron bar struck with a hammer, and then crash came the post bodily out of the ground; the engine continuing its course apparently without the slightest check whatever.

“Cast off the rope from the engine,” cried the Cannibal, “or by snakes you’ll have all the posts down between this and London.”

This was done with the loss of the rope, of course, which fortunately was not of great importance, as there was another one lying loose on the tender for use if requisite.

And now once again, the engine tears along in its mad career, the volunteer driver, Johnson, causing heaps of coal to be thrown in the furnace in order to get up the greatest possible amount of steam t

pull up the lost ground. Between five and six minutes had been occupied in destroying the telegraph wire, temporarily, at least; and, of course, the special train was again far ahead. The oscillation of the engine and tender increased in violence as the pace became greater and greater, until it was impossible to stand, or even sit, securely without holding. At her uttermost speed, Johnson declared she was going fully seventy miles an hour, a statement which Sam the stoker quite endorsed when questioned by Roland Dane.

On, still on, through the black night, thundering along like some gigantic monster laden with demons. Presently the lights of a station came in sight, and directly the engine had gone roaring through, Johnson shut off steam, and as quickly as possible brought her to a stand still, in order that the telegraphic communication might be stopped before they could signal on to the next station that the runaway engine had gone through.

The operation of fastening the rope to one of the posts was much more rapidly performed than on the previous occasion; for now they knew what was to be done.

“Right you are!” cried the Cannibal, sliding down the post and jumping on the engine with sailor-like activity. “Make fast, and go on ahead.”

The rope was made fast hurriedly by some one who certainly did not know what he was doing; and O'Rourke seeing that it was made fast to a part of the engine—a sort of handle—gave the word to Johnson, “Let her rip!”

On she went, the rope tightened, and, as before, up came the post. But something on the face of the engine also snapped, and Johnson turning sharply gave vent to a cry of dismay,

One of the handles or leavers connected with the machinery had been broken; some one, name unknown, having made fast the rope thereto. Johnson had turned steam full on.

Well might he exclaim in dismay, when his practised eye realized the fact that the lever, by which steam was shut off in order to stop the engine, had been broken.

Still there was no need for despair; it might not be much injured, or it might be repaired.

So he at once set to work to inspect the state of the case. In two minutes the engine was again thundering along at full speed.

Jonathan Johnson was a man of few words, and not by any means demonstrative as a rule.

But on this occasion, after conclusion of the chorus of "Bonnie Dundee," which Hector M'Ivor M'Gregor M'Nab had again struck up—he turned to Captain O'Rourke and, looking him seriously in the face, said—

"I'm d——d if we're not in for it now. Seems to me it's a certainty of a smash this time."

"What's the matter?" the engineer asked O'Rourke, more struck by his manner than words.

"Only that some of the machinery's broken. The engine's going sixty miles an hour, and I can't stop her."

"No, nor any other living kind, white man or black

man either," yelled out Big Bob the rightful driver. "It was I did it. I hitched the rope on. Nothing can stop her now but a smash till the fires burn down, and the steam works off, and won't be for nigh half an hour, and long before that you'll be into the special ahead. I reckon you'll see her lights in about five minutes,"

O'Rourke gave vent to a tremendous Irish oath, or rather string of oaths.

"Why, man alive, you'll be smashed up as well as us; or do you think you've got wings to fly when the smash comes?"

"I don't think anything of the sort, mate. I know I shall be smashed up with you; but then, I shall have the double satisfaction of knowing I am avenged on the men who attacked me and robbed me of my engine, and that I shall die at my post."

The big engine-driver looked almost heroic as he boldly stood forth and said these words. But some of those whom he thus coolly boasted of having doomed to death by being smashed up with himself, were in no humour to appreciate his grim heroism.

When it became known to all on the engine and tender, there was a scene of great confusion. Hector M'Nab was foremost amongst those who were most furious against the driver.

"Over with him! Throw him over and let him have the first taste of being smashed!"

Several others followed him, and O'Rourke himself excited and furious did not seem disposed to offer any objection to the engine-driver being thus summarily disposed of.

Jonathon Johnson too said never a word ; but stood sullenly glaring at the man who had thus instantly deprived him of all command over the engine.

Big Bob stood his ground manfully, and never quailed in the least.

Men's passions were roused, their blood was up, and it would, perhaps, have fared ill with him, had he not found a champion, and that in an unexpected quarter.

"No, he shall not be thrown over. Whoever attempts to do it, shall serve me so first."

It was not, as might have been expected, one of the biggest and strongest of the party who thus ventured to interpose between angry men and the object of their wrath ; but one feeble in body, though dauntless and strong in heart—no other than Jacob Knox, the Lancashire lad, and one time drummer-boy.

He placed himself right before Big Bob, and stood boldly, defiantly, ready to back his words.

He had not long to stand alone.

Roland Dane quickly placed himself by his side.

"And I say the same, my friend," he cried aloud. "I can say no better."

And very quickly the two were joined by yet another. The strong young man, John Talbot, who in wrestling had overthrown the canny Scotchman, Hector M'Ivor ; and made him lower his vaunting crest.

"I'll fight for the engine-driver, or any other man who is glad and proud to die at his post."

All this was carried on almost at shouting pitch ;

and now the President roared out (he had a tremendous voice) :

“ Gentlemen—let the man alone. We can’t blame him. He, though he puts us in great danger, is not afraid to share it ; and is willing to die at his post—may we all do likewise.”

Thus this episode, which threatened to end in the violent death of Big Bob, passed off.

Still the engine thundered on.

Station after station flashed by, as it were like a gleam of light, and they could scarce tell, as they whirled along, whether there were any of the railway people on the platform or not.

One thing was certain now, however, and that was, that their rapid passage could no longer be telegraphed from station to station.

They were now rapidly approaching Dover—could not be more than fourteen or fifteen miles therefrom, and still the engine thundered on like a runaway horse, apparently with little diminished speed.

“ Red lights ahead !” shouted Jack Rutter, the sailor, who was keeping a good look out.

The lights of the second special they proved to be, and as, despite the slowly diminishing fire, there was still plenty of steam, they rapidly came up with it. Nearer, nearer—pass another station—then into a tunnel—then out again into a cutting—then once more plunged the engine into the dark bowels of the earth.

“ Shout, lads ! shout !” cried Johnson ; “ the driver of the other train may hear us, and put greater speed on, if he can.”

They did shout, and kept on shouting and yelling like demons in tunnel and cutting, and yet still the engine rapidly gained.

Nearer—nearer, till they could see faces protruded from the carriage windows. Nearer still—nearer. Then the red light shot further ahead, and there seemed hope that a collision might be avoided, especially as the speed of the engine began to decrease all at once, and steam rushed out in a dense volume.

Johnson had succeeded in cutting a pipe communicating with the boiler, so that a great quantity of steam rushed out.

A half minute more, and there was no longer sufficient steam to drive the piston, and the engine rushed on only with its own impetus.

“Hooray!” shouted Johnson, the volunteer driver, “we’re all right.”

Then there went up a great shout of joy, in which only Big Bob the rightful driver did not join.

He felt a sort of grim joy at the thought of the terrible revenge he had taken.

“Dang it all—I must have the best of it, if we’re all killed together. I am only one—and there’s a score of them. Twenty to one I’ve heard sporting men say is great odds.”

He felt now a sort of surly disappointment, that this good thing of twenty to one was not to come off.

But Jonathan Johnson shouted a little too soon.

A short time later there was heard a sharp “bang,” followed by a crashing and grinding noise.

The legitimate driver who, now that he thought

all danger was over, had sunk into a state of sullen apathy, started violently, and a look of excitement came over his hard features.

“ A collision, somewhere ? ”

“ It’s the two specials smashed together.”

And so indeed it was.



CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER THE COLLISION.

IT was a wild and terrible scene to which Sir Robert Barclay awoke, after a brief period of insensibility.

He found himself surrounded by several men, one of whom had just poured some brandy down his throat. These were the police officers whom he had procured to help execute the forged warrant he held, and some other men who, in case of need, had nothing to render them so scrupulous, as perforce the officers must be, lest they should exceed their duty.

Staggering to his feet, the baronet soon found that no bones were broken, and that he had only suffered from a violent shock.

Looking around him, he beheld at a little distance Lord Algernon and John Carmichael seated by the side of the embankment, pale as ghosts, with heads bound up, and faces cut and scarred by the window-glass. A grim smile came over his features, and taking another drink from the brandy-flask, he walked towards them, seeming to exult, with fiendish joy, in the fact of their being hurt.

Even at that moment—while still weak from the concussion—he could not refrain from taunting his less fortunate fellow-villians.

“ You infernal fools ! ” he said, “ why didn’t you knock all the glass out of your windows, as I told you, and barricade yourselves up in the way I did ? Too much scared I suppose. Pretty fellows, certainly ; serve you right—that’s all I’ve got to say.”

Then Sir Robert, who was by no means in such good fettle, or so much at his ease as he tried to appear, turned away and surveyed the scene.

There was plenty of light, for the brake of the last carriage of his train was on fire, having been set alight by the hot coals from the furnace of the engine which had smashed into them. The last carriage was nearly smashed to bits, and the other carriages, and the engine of the special, were thrown off the line.

The other engine, too, which had run into them was off the rails, and, not only so, but had fallen over on its side, so as to completely block up the “ up ” line of rails also.

Everybody seemed stunned by the shock—mental and physical—which the catastrophe had occasioned.

“ What the devil’s the meaning of all this ? ” said Sir Robert, addressing the engine-driver of his train. “ You are the fellow who spoke to me through the window, I think, in the tunnel, and told me there was sure to be a smas’l ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” the man said, in a quiet subdued manner; for neither he nor any one who had been in the collision had recovered their nerve.

“ Well ! what’s the meaning of it all ? ”

“ ’Deed I don’t know, sir—there’s been a smash, sir——”

“Yes, yes ; that’s plain enough. Where’s the other train ?” he asked, sharply.

Sir Robert was just getting the better of his shaking, and had an eye to business.

“The other train, sir ?”

“Yes, you dolt ! the one we ran into.”

“Oh ! she wasn’t knocked off the rails, sir—and she’s in Dover by this time.”

“Then she’ll escape me after all.” exclaimed the baronet. “How far is it to Dover ?”

“About seven miles, sir.”

“Do you know your way about here ?”

“Born in Dover, sir.”

“Do you know where we can get a conveyance to take us to Dover at once—within half an hour ?”

“There’s the ‘George the Fourth,’ about a quarter of a mile from here, sir ; they’ve got a fly they let out ; and, then, half a mile further on there’s the village of Monckton—there’s an old inn there, where they’ve a dog cart, a big omnibus, and a waggonette.”

“That’s the place for us, then. Show us the road ; I’ll pay you well.”

“Ah, but, sir, I mustn’t leave my engine—train.”

“Nonsense.”

“At all events, till they send up an engine from Dover. They can’t be long now ; the other train must be in by this time. For the life of me I can’t think why the driver didn’t stop when he knew there was a smash : but he always was a fool, *he* was.”

Now the fact is that the driver did stop ; but Lady Maude in a paroxysm of terror, besought him to go on to Dover ; and Ellen Carmichael, who was calm

and collected, urged that he himself and his stoker could do no good—that a large number of men was necessary to clear the rail, and also surgeons for the wounded in the accident.

To stop, she urged, would be but to waste valuable time; and his better course would be to hasten on to Dover, and give information of what had occurred. Her arguments prevailed, and he went again ahead, full speed.

Meanwhile the fire gained ground, and the blaze of the burning carriages soon attracted people to the railway cutting who had been aroused by the shock of the collision.

It was a strange sight—the lurid glare of the burning train lighting up a capsized engine: a giant overthrown, and another off the rails; while around the blaze stood the passengers in the second special, with the stoker and driver.

But the most singular sight of all was a solitary man seated on one of the driving-wheels of the overturned engine.

This was Big Bob, the man in legitimate charge of the engine. When the smash came, he with all the others on the engine and tender, had jumped off.

The engine, before turning over, had tottered for a few seconds, and it was only when one wheel sunk deep in some soft sand that it seemed finally to make its mind to capsize at all.

Sir Robert's quick eye, which did not miss much, caught sight of this figure sitting intent and disconsolate on the wheel of the engine.

“Who's that?” he asked, sharply, of the driver.

"That, sir?" said the man, who, now having had a drink or two from Sir Robert's flask, was beginning to recover from the shock and fright, "that's Big Bob, sir. He's drove that engine for years, sir. It'll break his heart, her being smashed. He's a little bit touched, sir, I'm thinking, is Big Bob; for I've heerd him talk to that 'ere engine just as if it were a Christian. It'll drive him right stark staring mad, see if it don't, sir."

"Hang Big Bob!" exclaimed the baronet, vaguely. "Who are all those fellows I saw on the engine and tender, when I looked out of the window before the collision?"

"Lord only knows, sir; may be Big Bob's going mad, right off, and this is a freak of his. I always said he was touched, sir, and would break out some day. What do you think he done one day, sir, over in the Borough, as true as I'm a living man."

"Confound the Borough! What about this where we can get a conveyance to Dover?"

"The George,' sir, is the nearest; but the other has the best accommodation."

"The nearest, then. We'll have a fly at 'The George' for myself and as many of our party as it can carry, and the rest may go on to the other place, and follow as fast as they can. Come then—this way. Five pounds for your trouble."

The man reflected. Five pounds was not to be picked up every day.

"But then an engine and carriages might come from Dover at any minute to the scene of the accident, and we ought to be there to give an account."

“Come along, if you’re coming,” said Sir Robert, sharply

Finally he decided that he would show the baronet the way to “The George,” get the five pounds, and make all possible haste back.

“All right, sir, I’ll show you the way.”

“Now then, Algernon,” cried Sir Robert, “and you, John Carmichael, and the rest of you, we will make a move from this. Our bird has flown, and we must be on the track.”

“Wait till this cut on my cheek has stopped bleeding, can’t you?” said Lord Algernon, in a weak, tremulous voice: “you talk as though we had not just been through a terrible accident, and barely escaped with our lives.”

“Well, we have escaped, and that’s enough,” replied Sir Robert, who had now regained all his native hardihood: “‘a miss is as good as a mile,’ and if we don’t look out we shall lose our Miss”— ha ! ha ! ha !”

There was something shocking in his harsh laughter amidst such a scene of wreck and ruin, albeit no lives had been lost.

“He’s a hard ‘un, he is, that Sir Robert,” remarked one detective police-officer to another.

“Ay, he is so ; a sort that don’t care for God, man, nor devil. I’ve come across the likes of him at Portland, when I was a warder there. There’s no taming nor breaking their spirit. Bad as man can be ; there’s nothing but the halter can cure ‘em.”

Sir Robert, of course, did not hear this flattering speech concerning himself; for he was ta

the driver whilst waiting impatiently for Lord Algernon to finish binding up his cut face.

Pointing to a group of men who stood altogether aloof from the crowd which had been attracted to the scene, he said, "Who are those fellows? Are they those who were on the engine before the smash?"

The driver looked hard.

"Can't say I know any of 'em sir. But the light's uncertain and flittering where they are, and it's a'most too far to make out faces. Maybe it is as you say."

Sir Robert looked hard and earnestly at this group, and a suspicion stole across his mind that the figures were familiar to him; but he dismissed the idea from his mind, unable to decide with anything like certainty, or to recognise one single form or face.

"Bah!" he said to himself "the shock to the nervous system has made me fidgety and full of foolish fancies." Then aloud—

"Now then, Algernon, come along. We can't afford to waste more time. We must be on the scent again, and that sharp, or the bird will have flown for good. See, already there is a grey light in the east. It wi'l be daylight in another hour, and by that time we must be in Dover."

So saying, he led the way with the engine-driver.

The others, including John Carmichael, followed him as he hastened to climb the embankment.

"That man," murmured Lord Algernon, "is the devil himself. Nothing daunts him, nothing turns him from his purpose. Most men after such an escape and such a shaking, would be only too glad of rest

and quiet to go to bed for a day. But *he—he—confound him!*—is hotter than ever in pursuit of his object."

The party mounted the embankment, and, guided by the driver, crossed a field and struck into a parish road.

They did not go unnoticed. The eyes of all in the group, which Sir Robert Barclay had especially noticed, were upon them as they climbed the steep embankment and struck out over the fields. But the glare of the burning woodwork was scarcely sufficient to throw a clear light to the top of the high embankment.

Sir Robert was muffled up to the mouth in the travelling shawl which had before saved him in great measure from the effects of the collision, so that even one who knew him intimately would not have recognised him.

And thus it happened that even the keen eyes of Roland Dane (one of the group in question), who, well knowing that the party climbing the embankment was that in pursuit of Lady Maude, of one of whom she stood in such abject terror, yet failed to recognise Sir Robert Barclay as their one time companion in the council chamber.

When the engine dashed into the rear of the second special train, its speed had been greatly diminished by reason of the escape of steam, which Johnson had caused by cutting the pipe.

The carriage with which it came into collision splintered up and so eased the shock, which would have been much more severe if the resistance had

been perfectly solid. Still, the concussion was very great, and caused the engine to rear up partly on its hind wheels. For a moment it was doubtful whether or no the engine would settle down on the rails ; but, after oscillating violently for a moment or two, one wheel sank deep in soft sand, and the ponderous machine fell heavily over on its side.

Some of those who were on the tender and platform jumped, while others who were unable to do so were thrown heavily to the earth.

Nearly every one was scratched, bruised more or less severely, and some rather badly hurt. Tom Steele, the farmer, was thrown on his left shoulder, and when he picked himself up was unable to use his arm. The joint swelled rapidly, and Dr. Columba was uncertain whether or not the shoulder-blade was dislocated, but was of opinion that such was not the case.

Mr. Benjamin Bouncer had a small bone of his left arm broken, his right knee badly sprained, and was also a good deal cut about the face.

Samuel Slamm, the gigantic blacksmith, was scalded by hot steam and water from the boiler, and suffered considerable pain.

There were many other casualties, but these were the most serious, and the three injured men were being attended to by Dr. Columba by lantern-light.

He had quickly caused an improvised tent of travelling rugs, which many of the Twenty had brought, to be erected ; and a bed having been made of cloaks, overcoats, and so on, the worthy surgeon, with instruments, bandages, and lint spread out beside him, was

busy doing his best to alleviate the pain of the injured men, and put them in a fair way of recovery.

In this he was so successful, that in the space of half an hour, all except Mr. Bouncer, whose knee was injured, were able to walk.

It was the necessity of attending to those more seriously hurt that delayed our friends, and enabled Sir Robert Barelay and his party to get a start.

As for the legitimate engine-driver, Big Bob, he got a heavy fall, and lay for some moments half-stunned. When he recovered, after looking ruefully on the overturned engine, he went and seated himself on one of the wheels, and, though bleeding from a bad cut on the head, nothing would induce him to leave his post in order to have his hurt attended to.

Roland Dane and O'Rourke, with Sir Robert Barclay and his party, bore up with considerable uneasiness and much impatience.

“We must be after them!” said the former.

“Faith and we must, and that sharp too, or they’ll steal a march on us.”

All but the three badly-injured men had now “pulled themselves together,” as O'Rourke expressed it; those who had received cuts and bruises having bound up their hurts, and made ready for a start. It was well known by all that the object of this mad enterprise was to reach Dover as soon as the occupants of the second special train, in order that a lady might be protected from their violence, or, if necessary, rescued from their hands.

More than this little or nothing was known. Even Roland Dane, who had without hesitation constituted himself champion of the Lady Maude, by at once responding to her appeal, was ignorant of the real nature of the injury her enemies sought to inflict.

It crossed the mind of more than one of the adventurers, that this adventure on which they had all embarked almost partook of the nature of insanity, and yet there was scarce one who felt inclined to recede. They had gone too far now to go back, and even the quietest spirits among the Twenty were now prepared to go ahead and see the affair out.

While Dr. Columba was attending to the injured men, Roland Dane, and O'Rourke made diligent inquiries of the country-people, who quietly began to assemble, as to their whereabouts, and the nearest place where they could get a conveyance to Dover.

Roland received the same answer as had Sir Robert Barclay, that there was a fly to be had at the George the Fourth Inn, a little over a quarter of a mile away ; and that there was another inn at Monckton, where there were several conveyances to be had ; “but,” his informant added, “the landlord was a cantankerous old chap, and it was ten to one whether he’d get up.”

“Bet my life he does get up,” said Roland Dane, derisively ; “it’s a matter of importance, and he must get up, or we’ll pull the house down about his ears.”

Sir Robert Barclay and his party had been gone

about a quarter of an hour. Dr. Columba had finished with the injured men. However, to do him credit, he had made the best of it, as he had strapped up Tom Steele's shoulder, and was moreover able to state that it was not dislocated, but only strained and bruised ; had set the small bone of Mr. O'Rourke's arm, which had been broken, had tightly bandaged his knee, and had dressed the burns of Samson Slamm so skillfully that he felt little pain.

All were now able to walk except Mr. Benjamin Bounce, and he, fortunately, being light, could be carried easily in an extemporised litter formed by a railway rug, each end of which was carried by two of the party.

Thus slung, hammockwise, the patient was as comfortable as though at home in bed, and, as Hector M'Nab told him consolingly, "a great deal more glorious."

The grey light of dawn had begun to steal over the scene, when our party of twenty (or rather twenty-one, for there was Darby Kelly, the Irish secretary, who once before we had nearly forgotton) started for the village of Monckton, Roland having retained one of the countrymen as guide across the field.

Just as they prepared to leave the scene of the disaster, the shriek of an engine-whistle was heard from the direction of Dover. "That's the engine despatched from Dover with assistance," said Roland Dane to O'Rourke. "We have made a move just in time. Doubtless the driver, Big Bob, will tell all about the affair, and if we had been delayed longer

he would have pointed us out, and that might have been unpleasant; for you know, Captain, that the authorities would call this escapade of ours by rather an unpleasant name."

"And what the divil would they call it, eh? It isn't burglary is it?"

"No, hardiy that," replied Roland, laughing.

"Nor manslaughter?"

"Not quite, though it might have been," replied our friend, more gladly. "It was a narrow shave that smash."

"And it can't be robbery from a dwelling-house—for the divil was in the open air when we took her?"

"No, not that."

"And it can't be obtaining goods under false pretences, any way?" pursued O'Rourke; "for by jabers, we made no pretence at all, but just took the crater by main force and started off."

"No, there was not any false pretence, certainly."

"Well, then, what the divil can it be? There's no offence known to the law such as this; therefore it isn't an offence at all."

"I'm afraid that a bench of magistrates would hardly look at it in that light."

"And what would they call it then?" persisted O'Rourke; "sure they must give it a name."

"What would they call it?" replied Roland Dane, laughing to himself—"why, abduction."

"Ah! to blazes wid ye now. How would we be abducting an engine?"

"It seems we did."

“Once on a time,” continued O’Rourke, “I abducted a young lady—an heiress she was—in Ireland; but she was a ward in Chancery, and, by jahers, they committed me for contempt of Court for that little bit of abducting. But put it how you like, you can’t make an engine a ward in Chancery. So what can they do?” he finished up, triumphantly.

“Charge us with stealing.”

“Devil a bit, for we’ve not stole it—there the eratur lies, tired, and its own regular driver mounting guard over it. No, they can’t make stealing out of it.”

“Wilful damage, then; which is punishable by the English law with fine and imprisonment.”

“Wilful damage” cried the Irishman, vehemently. “You don’t mean to say that they’ll be such fools as to think we smashed into the other train on purpose? By the piper that played before Moses, I’d have given a good deal to have stopped the devil: sure I thought we’d be smashed up entirely. Wilful damage, indade—there was nothing wilful about it as far as I was concerned. Besides, we’ll pay for all damage, and make the company a present in the bargain for our bit of a spree.”

“No spree at all,” put in Roland Dane, quickly; “what we have done was with an object—don’t forget that, Captain O’Rourke—and that object is not achieved yet.”

“Right you are, my lad. We haven’t done it yet, but we will; by the holy poker, we will—”

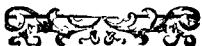
“Here we are, close to the inn where we hope to get a conveyance.”

"Hope!" said O'Rourke; "by jabers, we'll have one if there's such a thing in the stables."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Roland; "there's a wagonette at the door of the inn now. They are just putting the horses in."

"Just in time for us," said O'Rourke, coolly. "We'll have that conveyance, I'm thinkin', if it's another case of abduction."

And he kept his word for they did have it.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE town of Dover is not remarkably lively, and except when the mail boats come in and go out there is not usually much stirring in the streets, even in the afternoon.

It may well be imagined, then, that at five o'clock on a bleaksome morning there was scarce a soul to be seen, when the Lady Maude and Helen Carmichael arrived in the special train, which fortunately escaped without injury.

No fly was to be had, so they proceeded on foot to the Lord Warden Hotel, a porter carrying their luggage.

At this large and handsome establishment a night watchman was kept up all night, otherwise they would have had difficulty in getting admission at all at that early hour.

The man started, as well he might, when he opened the door, and beheld two females, both handsome—one tall, and finely formed, attired plainly—the other, a delicate slightly made young lady, wrapped in costly furs. She was very pale, and had a frightened look on her lovely features; a startled anxious expression in her soft eyes, as though she had but just escaped from some terrible danger, and did not yet even feel herself safe.

The night porter of the Lord Warden hesitated what to do, as indeed was no wonder, for there was

no one up in the hotel, and not knowing of a special train, he could not possibly conceive how those two ladies, both evidently travellers, had come.

A rapid idea of a vessel having come in during the night flitted across his mind ; but this was dismissed almost as soon as formed.

Finally, he almost decided that they must be criminals flying from justice, but then the presence of the railway servants accompanying them, and carrying their luggage, negatived this, so that altogether he was in a complete fog.

“ We require apartments at once,” said Helen Carmichael, always prompt to speak and act ; “ this lady and I are going by the mail boat to Calais presently.”

“ Very sorry ma’am—no one up ma’am—this time of the morning—more than my place is worth to wake the manager up when there’s no trains in.”

“ No train in,” exclaimed Helen Carmichael bewildered.

“ No, no train in ; and excuse me for saying so, but I’d like to know how you got here, seems to me suspicious-like, to say the least of it.”

Hereupon, fortunately for Lady Maude and her humble companion, the railway porter spoke up, and possibly with an eye to an increased remuneration for his services, quite confounded the hotel official by informing him in an audible whisper, that they were grand ladies from London, belonging to the Queen’s court, and that they had come in a special train ordered by government on a secret mission connected with royalty.

This procured a wonderful and immediate effect, and the two fair fugitives were at once ushered into the coffee room, where a fire was kept burning all night, while he hastened to communicate with the manager.

By the time that Lady Maude and Helen had recovered a little from the agitation consequent on their night's adventure and narrow escape, and under the influence of a good fire, a little colour had come to the pale face of the persecuted heiress, the manager of the hotel himself appeared, all politeness and anxiety to make the unexpected guests comfortable.

What accommodation would their ladyship's wish for?

Fires were being lighted in a suite of rooms, would they like a hot bath prepared, or would they take refreshment, or would they prefer to retire to rest at once.

Maude eagerly replied that she would prefer to remain up. Could they have a room with a fire looking out on the sea!

"Yes, certainly; and about refreshments, would they take breakfast?"

Maude was murmuring that she did not care about it, when Helen Carmichael, always prudent and thoughtful, took up the speech, and suggested that after the fatigue they had undergone some support and nourishment would be advisable.

Maude acquiesced, and the thoughtful Scotch girl ordered hot port wine negus, while a good breakfast was being prepared. For a short time they were established in a handsome private room, overlooking

the sea, and drawing the sofa up to the fire Helen prevailed on the other to lie down and get a little rest.

A glass of hot port wine, to which Miss Carmichael had caused a half glass of brandy to be added, and which she almost compelled Lady Maude to drink quickly, produced the effect she expected, for the exhausted girl dropped off into a sleep—restless and to dream ; haunted, it is true—but still she slept.

Helen Carmichael, who was stronger, both bodily and mentally, than the object of Sir Robert Barclay's persecution, proceeded after a hasty toilette to make certain enquiries and arrangements.

First, she ascertained when the boat would leave for Calais, and by this time the servants and others belonging to the hotel being thoroughly awake and about, she gave orders for two berths to be secured, and also for a close fly to be ready so soon as the steamboat was alongside the wharf, as she judged they would be safer once on board should any fresh outrage be attempted or intended.

She found that they had made a mistake as to the time when the Calais boat would leave, for that instead of early in the morning, it was not till two in the afternoon, and that it would probably be alongside the wharf, getting up steam at mid-day.

She resolved to allow Lady Maude to sleep to that time, when she would arouse her, and after taking some refreshment, go on board.

Next, this self-possessed woman went to the hotel manager, and proceeded to give him some directions.

“ For particular reasons, sir, we wish that our arrival at the hotel should not be known.”

“Very good, madam.”

“In fact, the business on which we are bound is of the utmost importance, as you may judge from the fact of our travelling at night by special train.”

“Quite so, madam.”

“Secrecy is also indispensable,” she continued; “it was from the high reputation we had heard of the Lord Warden and its management which induced us to come here.”

“I trust the good opinions you have heard of the hotel and of my management, my lady, may be deserved—it shall be my earnest endeavour to make it so.”

“Thank you,” said Helen graciously, “you will understand then that if any enquiries are made for Lady Maude or myself, either by name or description, you will know nothing of any such people, and give instructions to your servants that they also shall deny any ladies answering to our description being in the hotel.”

“Your commands shall be punctually attended to my lady.”

“Thank you, that will do for the present,” said Helen bowing.

The manager took his departure, and Helen congratulated herself on her forethought in taking means to mislead Sir Robert, if he should be still in pursuit and on the track.

But there was one thing that did not for a moment occur to her, that if she had by those means succeeded in concealing themselves from pursuing enemies, she had also shut themselves out from the aid and advice of friends; she knew not that at that very moment a

body of determined men were hastening to their aid in response to the Lady Maude's appeal, and, being in ignorance of this, supposed that none but an enemy could possibly enquire for them.

Presently breakfast was served, and the manager again presented himself to ascertain whether everything was satisfactory in the attendance and otherwise.

Incidentally he asked if she had heard anything of the accident a short distance up the line.

She replied that she knew there had been a collision, that indeed their train had suffered a considerable shock, but that she heard no more about it.

Thereupon he commenced giving her a long and glowing account of the most mysterious affair. He went on to say, "it seems my lady that behind you there was another special train."

"Ah!" cried Helen, well aware of the fact, and that the enemy was in pursuit.

"And that is not all, my lady; behind the other special was an engine, it seems, crowded with men o whom no one knows anything. It is all a mystery. This engine dashed by stations, paying no heed whatever to danger signals, and finally ran into the second special, causing a terrible accident. The telegraph wires have been destroyed, so there can be no precise intelligence from London till they are repaired, and the line cleared so that traffic can be opened. But from all I hear from the railway people at our station, it appears that the engine must have been seized somewhere up the line by a gang of desperadoes, either for a mad freak, or with some criminal design. Al

have escaped it seems, though it is believed that several were badly hurt, if not killed. No one knows to a certainty what has become of them ; it is supposed, however, that they have scattered across the country, and concealed themselves to avoid being apprehended.

Now, at the time, as it happened, the desperadoes, as the hotel manager styled them, were on the road to Dover.

Of course they had committed an illegal act in seizing an engine, and had there been loss of life in collision, would have been liable to be tried for manslaughter. As, however, most fortunately, nothing more than great damage to the company's property was the result of their audacious exploit, the leaders of the affair, on thinking it over, thought that a liberal payment to the company for actual loss sustained might put matters straight.

Meanwhile, however, it would certainly be advisable for all of them to go abroad awhile and stay there until the affair had blown over a little.

Such was the resolution Roland Dane and Captain O'Rourke came to as they drove rapidly on towards Dover. They were by no means disposed, however, to relinquish the hope of accomplishing the sole end of this mad adventure, namely, to find out the Lady Maude, warn her of her danger, and offer the best protection in their power.

But of all this the young lady and Helen Carmichael knew nothing, or they might have acted differently.

The latter was a little surprised at the narrative

of the manager, but was quite unable to account for or to understand the extraordinary proceedings on the line that night.

She fully believed that Sir Robert Barclay and his gang were in pursuit in the second train, but what was the meaning of the engine after that—the collision or the result thereof, all these were utter and entire mysteries to her, and she gave up thinking on the subject.

It was now eleven o'clock, and Helen was thinking of awaking Lady Maude in order that she might take some breakfast, and otherwise refresh herself after the terrible night she had passed, when the report of a cannon, caused her to start, and aroused the sleeper.

Scarce knowing why she thus acted, Helen went to the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony.

It was but a passing curiosity to see where this firing was, but had an important effect on events.

Just as she was about stepping back again a gentleman walking quickly along the street happened to cast his eyes upwards and saw her.

He started—gazed for a second, and then hastened under the balcony so as to be out of sight.

He stood for a moment in thought, and then taking a passing fly, got in and was quickly driven off.

Could Helen and the Lady Maude have known who it was who had seen the former, neither would have felt so easy in their minds, nor would the unfortunate heiress have experienced a revival of her drooping spirits at the near prospect of escape from her persecutors.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was John Carmichael who had thus unexpectedly caught sight of his sister on the balcony.

After a moment's thought he at once decided that where Helen was there also would be found the Lady Maude.

“I don't think she saw me,” he muttered to himself as he got into the fly, “and if she did its a chance whether she'd know me with my face plastered up as it is.”

He and Lord Algernon had both been to a surgeon, and the plaster with which that gentleman had strapped up the cuts inflicted by the railway carriage window when the smash took place, by no means improved their beauty.

Sir Robert himself, and those in his pay, were now employed in scouring the town in search of their lost guests.

They had tried all the hotels but could get no news of those whom they sought for. The manager of the Lord Warden had kept his word, and when Sir Robert asked there, answered decisively that he had seen nothing of any ladies at all answering to the baronet's description.

So promptly, and apparently frankly, did he say this that the lie was believed without question.

A meeting place had been appointed by Sir Robert

where he could be found at very short notice should anything be heard of the fugitives.

Hither hurried John Carmichael, eager to finish the business and get the promised reward.

It was half-past eleven when Sir Robert was informed that his wished-for prey had been discovered, and in a very short time he concerted measures to secure her capture.

Several of his hired agents were about the town in search of some intelligence of those he sought, but he had at his immediate call several detective police officers, besides other men in his own immediate pay.

Two were at once posted sentry over the hotel, with a messenger ready to take word should either Lady Maude or her companion leave.

This done he proceeded to consult as to what action should be taken to secure his victim.

“We must take her at once,” he said, “I propose that armed with the warrant we proceed to the hotel and seize her.”

“No wait, do nothing rashly or hurriedly,” put in Lord Algeron.

“Do nothing rashly—what rubbish, the fellow talks—why man alive,” cried Sir Robert impatiently, “the steamer leaves at two o’clock, and as sure as death she means to go by it.”

“There is more than two hours between this and the time for the boat to sail,” replied the other.

“But what’s the use of waiting, wasting time; why not do at once what must be done—quickly if at all.”

“Before you take her, decide what you will do with her.”

"Do with her," and Sir Robert laughed scornfully, "why keep a tight hold on her, d——n her, the —— for all the trouble she's given us."

It was Lord Algernon's sister of whom the baronet spoke in such a brutally insulting manner, but the amiable young nobleman took not the slightest notice.

"You remember what I said to you in the train."

"What about, you talk so much bosh that it is not worth while trying to remember all you say."

"I mean about that yacht."

"Oh yes, the one advertised for sale—the Flying Fish. £250 cash down; apply to Jackson and Graham."

"There's no time for that now."

"I don't see why it's impossible, and if it could be done, it would be a splendid thing indeed—once on board, we might take her right off to Scotland without a chance of her escape or even attempting to."

Sir Robert thought deeply.

What his companion had said was perfectly true, and he foresaw the possibility, even if he did get hold of the girl, in having much difficulty in keeping her, for it was not only her they would have to fear, but the disturbance Helen Carmichael would cause on her behalf, and the strenuous efforts she would surely make to enlist both sympathy and active aid. And there was a chance that she might succeed in procuring the release of the prisoner before she could be conveyed to Scotland.

Then the plot as to the forgery of the warrant must be discovered, and his position would be more desperate than ever.

Altogether, he would be very glad to adopt Lord Algernon's suggestion, and get her on board a yacht his own property if possible.

"And I tell you what," Algernon said suddenly, "if they would not sell her right out at a short notice they might let you take her for a short trial trip. I had a look at her a short time back—she's all ready for sea, and could sail at a few hours' notice if we had a crew on board."

"By Heavens," cried Sir Robert "it's worth trying at all events."

So hastily getting into a fly they were driven to Jackson and Graham's, who received them politely.

"We've called about that yacht you've advertised for sale ; my name is Sir Robert Barclay, and I should like to purchase her."

"Most happy to negotiate with you, I'm sure Sir Robert. I will communicate with my principal, so soon as you inform me what you propose, and then doubtless we can arrange it in a day or two."

"Day or two, nonsense—if anything is done, it must be done at once, down on the nail, for I'm a man of action Mr. Jackson. I've seen the vessel—I like her—she'll suit me, and I'll buy her at the advertised terms £250 down, and the rest as soon as you like, will that suit you."

With the words Sir Robert pulled out his pocket-book, and produced a roll of notes.

"There you are sir," I have £250 here in Bank of England notes. Draw up the agreement, give me a receipt for the £250, and I'll give you a bill at a fortnight for the remainder.

The head of the firm of Jackson and Graham thought he had a madman to deal with.

“Really—Sir Robert Barclay I think you said—you quite take my breath away ; I never heard of such a proposal in my life. Business cannot be done in that way—quite irregular I assure you.

“But here’s the money.”

“Quite impossible, sir.”

“I tell you what I’ll do—I’ll make it £500 down.”

Mr. Jackson was staggered, but by no means disposed to assent to such an unheard of proposal.

“My dear sir, I tell you once again, it is impossible—I should not think of acting in the matter without first consulting with the owner of the yacht whose agent I am.”

“But he is in Dover, I suppose,” persisted Sir Robert, and could be very soon communicated with.”

“He is in Dover sir,” replied the agent, “but that is no reason whatever why he should suddenly, at a moment’s notice, make a bargain, and conclude a transaction with a perfect stranger.”

Sir Robert saw that it was useless to press the matter any further in this direction ; so after pausing for a few moments to consider tried another tack.

Though not nearly so shrewd and cunning as Lord Algernon at times, when he was bent on an object he would be singularly fertile in expedient, trying plan after plan until he succeeded in gaining his end.

So it was in this case.

“Well, look here, sir,” he said with a pleasant laugh—(he could be pleasant when he choose) “I’ve taken a fancy to that little vessel ; in fact it’s not altogether

myself, for there's a lady in the case, and you know how hard it is to disappoint them of anything they set their hearts on. I tell you what I'd do—I'd pay fifty pounds to take her for a trial trip—just for a day, then if I like her, I'll purchase her at the advertised terms—you to have your commission of course. Fifty pounds for the trip and five per cent. if I buy her. Come what do you say—just give me a line to the owner, and I'll step round, and the affair will be done in ten minutes."

Mr. Jackson was more than ever staggered at this.

The liberal commission, fifty pounds for the trip, and five per cent. on the purchase-money, which would be sixty pounds in all, was indeed a tempting offer to a careful money making business man, and one difficult to refuse.

Still he hesitated.

"You'll excuse me, sir, for making the remark—but you're a stranger to me."

"My name is Sir Robert Barclay, baronet, of Farnham Hall, Surrey, and Inveresk, Scotland. Perhaps you may know the name."

"Perfectly!" replied the cautious man of business "but still you'll excuse me—but."

"Oh," I see said Sir Robert quickly, "I'm a stranger to you, and though I may be as I say, Sir Robert Barclay, you'd like some other evidence of it than my own—eh; isn't that it; yes of course it is," he went on without waiting for a reply. "Well as far as that goes I can satisfy you very easily; that is to say," he added, his countenance falling slightly, "if the

gentleman is at home, and lives anywhere near here. Do you happen to know Mr. Frederick Hutton, solicitor, and where he lives."

"Perfectly well," replied the agent briskly, "his office is not five minutes' walk from this."

"Then just oblige me by sending a clerk round—a boy," said the baronet, "and say that Sir Robert Barclay would like to see him for a moment or two in your office."

"Certainly, Sir Robert," was the now very civil reply, "but I really do not like troubling you, or seeming to doubt your word. Still if you insist Sir Robert, just as a matter of form I'll send round.

In ten minutes the messenger returned accompanied by Mr. Hutton, who greeted the baronet with warmth, tempered by a proper amount of deference due to a man of Sir Robert's supposed wealth. This settled the matter so far as the agent was concerned, and all that now remained was to deal with the owner.

"A note will do, I think, brief and to the purpose," said the baronet.

"Certainly, Sir Robert," and the note was forth with indited.

"Dear Sir,—The bearer of this, Sir Robert Barclay, a baronet of wealth and position, desires to become the purchaser of your yacht, the Flying Fish, and that immediately, or at all events, to take her for a trial trip. We think him most eligible as a purchaser, and remain,

Yours truly,

JACKSON & GRAHAM.

George Newstone, Esq.

Ten minutes afterwards Sir Robert and Lord Algernon were on their way with the letter to the house of Mr. George Newstone. How they succeeded we will leave to be developed as the story goes on.



CHAPTER XXV

THE Lady Maude awoke refreshed and cheered up by words of hope from Helen, as well as their immunity hitherto from molestation. After a slight breakfast they prepared to go on board the steam vessel, now lying alongside the quay, with steam nearly up, for it was one o'clock.

At a quarter past that hour they went on board, and Maude, after a timid glance around, descended into the cabin, and at once took possession of a berth, where she amused herself trying, with feverish anxiety, to hear the rumble of the machinery and splash of its paddles—signs that the vessel was on her way to her hoped for haven of safety—the shores of safety—the shores of France.

Helen Carmichael remained above for a while, and looked carefully and anxiously around, fearing, yet earnestly hoping not to see the faces of any of the conspirators, as she rightly considered them.

Half-past one came.

A quarter to two.

Still her keen eye looked in vain for any sign of their pursuers, either on the steamer or on the quay.

At last she said, "we are safe," when at ten minutes before the time of starting the steamer's bell began to ring.

Then she went down into the cabin, sought out Maude, whose heart, poor little bird, went pit-a-pat with a vengeance.

The two girls were in a little berth or cabin, about ten feet square, and Helen had closed the door when she entered.

At last the time for departure came, the signal was given, hawsers cast off, the paddlewheels slowly revolved, and the vessel began to tremble in that indescribable way common to all steamers.

“Safe! safe!” at last cried Helen Carmichael, clasping her hands with unfeigned joy, “we have escaped them now for good, and all thanks be to Almighty providence.

Then, too pleasurabley excited she ran up on deck, and Lady Maude prepared to follow her.

As she approached the companion-way two persons were descending—two men, both of them strangers to her, passengers doubtless she thought, and drew on one side to allow them to pass.

They came down into the cabin, but, in place of walking on, took up positions on either side of the stairs, leading on deck, and still facing her.

There was no one else in the cabin, and Maude thought it very strange and rude behaviour on their part to stop and stare her so hard in the face. However, she was not at all frightened—was too joyful at the thought of her final and fortunate escape from her enemies, and far too confident, in every way, now that she knew that the vessel had really started away from the shores of old England, for “*la belle France*,” where at least she could breathe in peace, and without

danger of being made the victim of man's tyrannical laws, made on his own behoof against weak women.

So a little bit angry and indignant, at the manner of the two strangers, she walked quickly to the foot of the stairs, and had her foot on the first step when she was startled at hearing her name pronounced, in a firm, quiet voice, with no tinge of rudeness therein. "Lady Maude, I believe," nothing more.

It flashed across her mind that they might be some of the officials of the steam boat come to collect the tickets, or to make out a correct list of the passengers, or something to do with passports.

Indeed, it was a vague sort of idea altogether that it had something to do with the authorities of the steam boat, and she was not frightened, only for the moment startled.

"Yes, that is my name," she said, turning to the man who spoke.

It was not so light as on deck, and the man stood in the shadow of the ladder, so she did not get a good view of his face, and saw nothing particularly to attract her attentions.

The man produced a paper from the breast pocket of his coat, and held it out.

"Something about the passages or passports, I suppose," she said, "I am really very ignorant of these matters."

"Please tell me what it is you require of me."

"No Lady Maude," said the man, "I hold a warrant to arrest you, and I now do arrest you in the name of the Queen."

He then touched her lightly on the shoulder.

“ You are my prisoner,” he said, and then handing the paper to the other man, went hastily up the ladder, leaving her in a state of utter terror and bewilderment.

“ Warrant in the name of the Queen ; what have I done, of what am I accused,” she faltered presently, turning very pale and trembling.

“ Of that I know nothing, madam,” he said, “ my duty is plain, to keep you in safe custody and to deliver you over to my superiors only.”

“ But what are you going to do with me, of what am I accused, what does the warrant say,” she cried distractedly.

“ You can read it, madam,” the man said, “ but I cannot let it out of my possession.”

As he spoke he held it towards her.

“ No, no, I cannot read it, do tell me what it is, what it all means, what you mean to do with me.”

“ Well the long and the short of it is madam, this warrant says you’re to be taken to Scotland, there to be dealt with according to law.”

As her ears heard, and her understanding drank in the meaning of the words a deadly faintness came over her.

A little cry escaped her, and pressing her hand to her heart, she grasped at the rail of the companion-ladder for support.

“ Oh, my God, my God,” she wailed, “ I am in the power of my enemy.”

Those words “ to Scotland ” revealed to her everything.

Like lightning’s flash came the convictions to her.

mind that this was Sir Robert Barclay's doing—that she was again in his power, with the cruel law at his back, and that he would bear her off by force to his lonely castle in Scotland—to her terrible as dungeons of Giant Despair.

To Scotland, there to be dealt with according to law.

The words rung in her ears, forced themselves into her mind, and the image of Sir Robert Barclay arose grim and threatening and terrible at the same time.

At first she felt inclined to shriek aloud in her agony, but gradually she grew calm, and a quiet look came over her features, which but for the restless glittering eye (usually so soft and dove-like), might have been thought to indicate resignation to her fate.

Such, however, was not the state of mind of the captive.

She was plunged in the depths of despair, tempered with a fierce anger quite unusual to her gentle nature.

“Now then, Tom, called a rough voice on deck, come along, don't be dilly-dallying there all day.”

The man who now held Maude captive, and who was thus spoken to, said, turning to her not without a tinge of pity in the tone of his voice :

“Now, madam, be good enough to come with me on deck.”

“Sir, I am at your service, in your power, do with me as you please.”

He motioned her to precede him, and she did so. On gaining the deck she cast a slow sad look around on land, and sea, and sky.

It was a bright beautiful day, and all nature seemed smiling in the sunshine.

But unfortunate Maude, as she stood on the deck, a prisoner, prayed for death—Death, the grim conqueror of kings, welcome friend and ally of the weak and oppressed.

Helen Carmichael came up, and saw at once by the pallor and the intense agony in the poor girl's face that some disaster had occurred.

"For heaven's sake dear lady," she cried, seizing the prisoners hand, "What is the matter."

"All is lost," replied Maude in trembling accents. "I am again in the power of my enemies."

"By what right do you interfere with or molest this lady?" cried Helen, turning eagerly on the man who held that lady a prisoner.

"By the right of this warrant which I hold!" he replied, showing the document.

"Let me see it," cried Helen, endeavouring to snatch it, but the officer held it away from her.

"Stand off young woman, I know my duty."

"What are you about to do with this lady, where are you going to take her."

"I shall act as my superiors may direct," he replied.

"Now young woman," said another man pushing through the crowd which had assembled around the group. Stand out of the way and do not attempt to interfere with an officer in the execution of his duty, and you Thompson bring the prisoner on to the gangway and set her into the boat so soon as it comes alongside."

At this moment steam was shut off the engines, the paddles ceased to revolve, and the vessel after passing ahead a short distance came nearly to a stand still

Two boats came alongside, one to the starboard the other to the port gangway.

Ropes were thrown to each, and Lady Maude being taken to the larboard gangway was hastily assisted down the ladder and into the stern sheets of the boat, when her hand was grasped by that of a gentleman, who placed her on the seat.

As he did so, he said, "Welcome, my dear Lady Maude," in tones of sneering mockery. "I am glad to meet you again, and trust that you have not suffered greatly from fatigue or alarm, owing to the adventures of the night."

The voice was that of Sir Robert Barclay, and Maude after gazing for a moment in bewildered terror in his face, screamed aloud, and then cried,

"Help, help, save me from this man, will no one save me?"

"Shove off," cried Sir Robert Barclay "and give way men."

The next moment the boat was clear of the steamer, and being rowed by four sturdy sailors towards a schooner yacht about half a mile away.

Some of the passengers cried "Shame," while Helen Carmichael stood looking at the receding boat in speechless despair.

"Lost, lost," she murmured "in the power of that bad cruel man. Heaven help you Lady Maude."

The London constables remained on board the

steamer, and so soon as the first boat had gone, prepared to embark in that which was lying at the port gangway.

As Helen stood and watched with straining eyes the unfortunate victim conveyed on board the yacht she felt herself touched on the shoulder.

"If you want to go to Calais in the steamer," a man said, "you had better remain, but if you'd rather go ashore again you can have a passage in our boat."

"What are they going to do with the lady?" she cried.

"Do with her, why take her to Scotland in custody of the Scottish constables I suppose. He isn't very bright or he would not have left the warrant behind him. I daresay though they'll manage to get over that."

"What Scottish constables?" cried Helen.

"Whom do you mean? him as is sitting alongside the baronet, John Carmichael, the one that got the warrant?"

"John Carmichael," cried Helen, "my wicked brother; he is no constable, let me see the warrant."

The man was impressed by her earnestness, and now that the prisoner had been taken off, did not object to show the warrant.

"This is a foul conspiracy," she said vehemently. "This warrant is a forgery. I do not believe for a moment that it is signed by the person whose name it bears. I believe it was signed by —

She stopped herself suddenly, for she was about to accuse her own brother of forgery, and this, though he might be guilty of the plot, she shrank from.

“Signed, who by?” asked the London detective, “if its not a genuine document who has committed forgery?”

“No matter, some one has, Sir Robert Barclay perhaps; he’s villain enough for that or worse.”

A gentleman in Sir Robert Barclay’s position would not run such a risk.

“Perhaps not. I will go a-shore in the boat, and do what I can to defeat this conspiracy.”

The officer’s crime-discovering instincts were now thoroughly aroused, and he pressed the agitated girl for further particulars; but Helen, sorely racked by conflicting feelings, and reluctant to incriminate her brother, would give no further information.

So soon as all were in the second boat the rope was cast off, and the steamer pursued her course to Calais. Helen Carmichael, when she again set foot on shore, was utterly at a loss how to act.

She could see the sailors on board the yacht busy getting up the anchor, and making other preparations for going to sea. Wandering like one distracted along the quay, her youth, good looks, and excited appearance attracted a good deal of attention, and presently a half drunken boatman came up and accosted her. Although she indignantly repelled his advances, he would not be denied, but pressed his company upon her.

“Come along, my dear, and we’ll have a glass of grog together; don’t stay there pet.”

“I wish to have nothing to say to you,” she cried; “allow me to pass.”

“Don’t be a fool,” continued the drunken man,

at the same time seizing hold of her arm ; “ come along with me, I’ve got lots of ‘ shiners.’ ”

She struggled to get free from him, and he, in endeavouring to hold her, lost his balance and fell.

Before she could take advantage of this he had regained his feet, and, with an oath, again seized hold of her.

Then alarmed, she cried for help, which fortunately was forthcoming in the shape of two young men, who quickly brought the drunken man to reason.

“ I hope that fellow has not hurt you ; you look terribly frightened and agitated.”

“ Ah ! sir, it is not for myself that I am in such trouble, but the Lady Maude, whom they have carried off. If you could give her any aid —

“ Lady Maude,” cried Roland Dane, for it was he and Jacob Knox who happened to be passing at the time ; “ why it’s the lady we are in search of—that is if you mean a lady who left London last night by a special train.”

Helen Carmichael took alarm at these words.

“ What, are you two in pursuit of her—has she yet more foes on her track. Alas, unhappy lady, hers is indeed a sad fate.”

“ No, no,” cried Roland Dane, “ we are her friends, I received a letter from her last night, praying for aid against certain people she did not name. Where is she—is she safe—has she escaped the danger she dreaded.”

“ Escaped ! no indeed ! by cruel fortune she has fallen into the hands of her bitterest foes, and is now

a prisoner on board yonder yacht, a victim of as wicked and cruel a plot as ever bad men planned."

"Explain yourself, we are her friends, and would serve her."

"Are you indeed the gentleman to whom last night she sent a letter from Victoria Station, also a miniature."

"See, here it is," cried Roland Dane, showing the portrait, "let that convince you."

"I am convinced," cried Helen, "can you aid her, can you free her from her enemies."

"We can try," replied Roland Dane, with plain common sense. "First of all, however, tell us all the circumstances."

"I will, but for reasons will not mention names. By means of a forged warrant she has been forcibly seized and conveyed on board a vessel, to be taken to Scotland. Her greatest enemy has succeeded in entrapping her into what he believes or professes to believe a legal marriage according to Scottish law. Covetous of her fortune, he has carried her off by force, intending to take her to his place across the border, where he could soon compel her to submit to a ceremony, about the legality of which there could be no dispute."

"But why the necessity of a forged warrant," asked Roland Dane.

"In order to enlist the aid of the police on his side, and prevent her being rescued by her friends. So far his wicked design has been defeated. We were on board the mail packet for France, and in an hour or so should have been beyond his power, but

on the very eve of escape, while the vessel had actually commenced her voyage, this unhappy lady was seized, forced into a boat, and taken on board yonder yacht. See, they are setting the sails. Do save her, sir ; save her from those wicked men if you can."

Roland Dane consulted for a moment or two with his friend. Then he called to him a sailor or boatman, and asked—

"What vessel is that," pointing to the yacht.

"That is a gentleman's yacht, called the Flying Fish. She's been sold to day, and her new owner is just going to sea in her for a trial trip I suppose."

"What is his name?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Nor anything about him. Nothing except that he hired ten men at high wages, and has several others of his own with him, so that for a small thing like that she's well manned."

"How many men do you think he's got on board altogether."

"Seventeen or eighteen I should think for certain."

"It seems to me Jacob," said Roland, that this vessel's likely to escape before we can collect our men and follow her. "See, she's hoisting her sails, she'll be at sea in half an hour."

"Would it not be possible to follow her?" asked Jacob.

"Yes," replied Roland, if we had one at our command.

"Could we not purchase one?"

"We might if there were one for sale."

“Or hire one.”

“I'll ask this sailor, he seems an intelligent fellow. Can you tell us my friend whether there is a vessel for sale, capable of keeping pace with or overtaking that yacht?”

“Yes I can, there's the brig Boneta. The captain's left her, and I, the mate, am in charge. The owners are open to charter her or sell her right out.”

“Could it be done at once, and is she ready for sea?”

“She's ready for sea, and as smart a little clipper brig as ever sailed. I don't believe there's a dozen yachts in the Royal Yacht Squadron could beat her.”

“The very thing, where can we see the owners, and if we can arrange with them are you willing to accept a berth as captain, ship a crew in the course of an hour or so, and set sail in pursuit of yonder yacht.”

“I'm ready and willing if it rested with me,” said the mate, “but you see the owner, he's in Boulogne on business, and left word for me to write to him whenever I heard of an offer for the brig.”

“But you see it must be done at once. Could you not take her out on a cruise, a sort of trial trip for him?”

“I might do so, but I doubt if I'd be acting right; suppose she was to be lost or damaged. It's true she's assured, but not to her full value.

“We will deposit five hundred pounds in your hands as security against loss or damage.”

“I don't know what to say, sir.”

“Fifty pounds for yourself and if we buy her or charter her, ten pounds a month to act as captain.”

The man hesitated, the offer was a tempting one to a sailor anxious for active employment.

“Fifty pounds down this instant,” said Roland.

This settled the matter.

“It’s a bargain, sir; I’ll do it; I’ll take her for a cruise on my own responsibility, with £500 down as security.”

“You shall have it, and about a crew.”

“I’ll get half a dozen good men in an hour.”

“Is she provisioned?”

“Yes tolerably well!”

“Good, I’ll send some more on board at once; in an hour’s time you may expect us on board, how long before you can make sail?”

“If you’re aboard in an hour I’ll be under sail and clear of the harbour half an hour afterwards”

“The yacht will not be out of sight by that time.”

“No, nor for three hours if this wind holds. I guarantee to overhaul her long before morning. The Boneta sails like a witch.”

And so it was settled.

Thus our adventurers obtained possession of a vessel even more quickly than did Sir Robert Barclay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IT is a bright moon-light night, and the waves of the English channel are rippled by a brisk, pleasant breeze

Two vessels may be observed standing on a north-easterly course, each with every possible stitch of canvass set.

One is a schooner-rigged yacht, the other a brig, clipper-built, and evidently a fast sailor—a veritable skimmer of the seas. The wind was about south, broad on the quarter of the brig, so that every sail drew, and she dashed through the smooth sea like the swift fish after which she was named, the Boneta.

It was the most favourable point of sailing for the little square rigged vessel, and she was obviously fast exhausting the schooner. In three hours she had gained seven or eight miles, and, as the nautical phrase has it, was coming up with her “hand over hand.” By two hours after midnight the yacht was only about five miles a-head.

All hands were on deck, for it was known by the newly shipped hands as well as our adventurers themselves, that the yacht was to be overhauled—boarded piratically—and some one rescued who had been carried off. However, when it seemed probable that in another hour or two the vessels would be alongside each other, Captain O'Rourke, supported

on one hand by Roland Dane, on the other by the mate of the brig, called all hands aft and addressed them.

“My lads—It’s now time that you should hear in plain words the meaning and intentions of this cruise. You see that yacht a-head—she’s got a d——d villain a-board, and a good many more villians —hired rascals of the chief one. Also she’s got a-board an unfortunate young lady, treacherously and unlawfully abducted by the chief villain. Now what we’ve got to do is just this—overhaul her; lay the brig alongside; take her by board; give the big villain and all his subordinate rascals a d——d good thrashing; rescue the girl; and prove ourselves and yourselves that we are men—and men who will risk broken heads to help a poor young lady fallen into the hands of her enemies. That’s all I’ve got to say, except when the affair is over, every man will receive ten pounds, and the first on board the Flying Fish five and twenty.”

This address, concise and to the point, was received with a ringing cheer: the concluding part about ten pounds a-piece finding especial favour.

All needful preparations were now made. The decks were cleared, and a small cannon used only for signalling purposes, was got up and mounted on the forecastle.

“We can pepper her sails with it, and riddle them with holes,” remarked Solomon Lobb, the old sailor, “if she attempts to get away.”

“Brace up the fore and main-yard—ease off the port, fore and main, lads.”

This was not good news, as it proved that the wind was beating forward more to the eastward, which would be more favourable to the yacht. Still, however, the brig gained on her.

And now we will transport ourselves to the cabin of the yacht. It is nearly four o'clock in the morning, and the moon is approaching the western horizon.

One elegantly fitted cabin is well lighted by two large oil lamps swinging from the ceiling.

One cabin is tenanted by two people only.

One Sir Robert Barclay, the other the Lady Maude.

The unfortunate girl is crouching on an ottoman at the extreme after part of the cabin, as far as possible from the man she so hates and fears.

He is pacing up and down, and presently stops before her.

“My Lady Maude—or rather I should say Lady Barclay—it is time that all this nonsense and child’s play should finish. You are my wife, and will land on the shores of Scotland where the marriage took place, and I shall at once convey you to my seat at Inveresk.”

“No, no,” cried the girl, “I am not your wife. I was never married to you. It was a trick. I was deceived and led to believe by my brother that it was but a trifling joke. Besides, there can be no marriage between us, for you—you are a Catholic, as have been all your family.”

“My Lady Maude,” he said, with a suppressed laugh, “do not think that pretext will save you. If

I am a Catholic, and was a Catholic at the time when that took place which constituted a legal marriage in Scotland, so were you."

"Ah! who can say so?"

"Your own acts and words prove it. Did you not frequently talk with Father Philip and Sister Ursula of joining the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church?"

"What if I did?" cried Lady Maude, seeming to gather courage, as she defended herself against these imputations of being his wife. "What if I did? Talking of a thing—even intending—is not the same as acting."

"Aye! but there are acts of yours also which go to prove that not only did you intend to change your religion, but had actually done so."

"What proof?" she asked. "I defy you to produce proof."

"I can easily do so," said Sir Robert, smiling sarcastically, and twirling his moustache. "In the first place, Father Philip will make affidavit of his conversations with you, and of religious exercises and passages you joined in, according to the rites of the Catholic religion. He is of opinion that you are legally and morally a Catholic."

"That is only the opinion of a priest, and cannot override justice and the law of the land. By what possible act of mine, which can be proved beyond question, have I proclaimed myself a Catholic?"

Sir Robert Barclay paused—looked at her with contemptuous triumph—and then said quietly—

"The rosary and Diamond Cross——"

“Ah! I am betrayed,” she cried.

Sir Robert went on—

“You went with your brother to London. He introduced you to a young lady—the Hon. Miss Blanche Ponsonby. With her you talked, and were confidential as to your religious feelings and intentions. Then you spoke of having a rosary of pearls and garnets, and a Diamond Cross. You were rich you said, and could afford to spend money on expensive jewellery. You asked her advice as to a jeweller, and she told you that she obtained her jewellery at Streeters, Conduit-street, Bond-street; that her chain, earrings, bracelets, &c., were machine made, as to the gold at least. You expressed great curiosity as to machine-made jewellery, and the next day you went with her to the said Mr. Streeters in Conduit-street. You then selected various articles, and, after spending an hour or more there, finally ordered a magnificent rosary and Diamond Cross. Also an ivory crucifix ornamented with turquoises, rubies, and emeralds. Miss Ponsonby remarked, smilingly, to the jeweller, ‘My friend has been converted, or perverted, to the Catholic religion, and wishes to signalise the event in this manner.’ You said nothing. You did not deny it; in fact, you assented. In that jeweller’s shop, by words and acts, you were declared a Roman Catholic.”

A cry escaped Lady Maude—

“Ah! great Heavens, I am betrayed. That girl, then, was a creature of yours?”

“Perhaps so,” replied Sir Robert mournfully—“at all events there is the fact.”

“Lost! lost!” cried the unhappy girl, “that Diamond Cross has been my ruin.”

Sir Robert laughed.

“It has been a hard fight my Lady Maude but I have won.”

Scarcely had the words passed his lips than a report was heard quite close, followed by the crash of timber and the fluttering of canvass.

Sir Robert ran on deck, and saw that the main-topmast was gone

About half a mile astern, and a little to windward, was a brig whose forecastle was crowded with men. The smoke still hanging about her bows told whence came the report and the shot which carried away the main-top-mast.

“D——n,” cried Sir Robert furiously, “what the devil is the meaning of this?”



CHAPTER XXVII.

HE soon learned what was the matter and what he had to expect.

The brig crept up, slowly but surely, for the wind had now again veered to a point most favourable to the yacht.

Just at dawn of day, however, the Boneta came close alongside.

“Heave to” was then shouted from her deck.

“I’ll see you d——d first,” yelled Sir Robert, who now recognized her friends, and guessed he saw in them the rescuers of Lady Maude.

In five minutes more the two vessels came into collision, and a desperate rush was made from the Boneta on to the deck of the Flying Fish. The fight was short, sharp, and decisive. Sir Robert fought bravely, obstinately himself, but was presently knocked down by a blow from a hand-spike. His crew, urged to resist by promises of liberal rewards, made tolerable resistance. But they were out-numbered, and soon overpowered, and in ten minutes the Flying Fish was in the hands of our friends, and Lady Maude was once more free from her feared and hated enemy, who styled himself her husband.

The captain of the Flying Fish declared that the yacht was seriously damaged, and, on examination, she was found to leak badly.

Under the circumstances, it would have been inhuman merely to rescue the abducted lady, and leave the rest of those on board the Flying Fish to their fate.

So it was decided that the yacht should keep company with the brig until she could reach a port, where she would be in safety, and be able to get the necessary repairs done.

Meanwhile there was an important point to be settled, no other than whether the brig should be steered now.

Having rescued the lady from her abductors, it was obvious that the next thing was to convey her whither she wished.

Accordingly Roland Dane and Captain O'Rourke went down into the cabin of the yacht, in order to ascertain her wishes.

She had heard the tumult and the noise of the fight, but had not any idea of what had really happened.

A faint hope arose within her heart, that it might in some way, be beneficial to her, but of the real truth she had no suspicion.

Great then was her astonishment at the appearance, in the cabin, of two of the visitors, and on recognising in one of them her old acquaintance of the park, and whom she had afterwards visited at the hotel—Roland Dane.

“Better late than never, Lady Maude,” said the latter gaily. “I got your note—was too late to see you at the station, but followed in a special train of rather a peculiar character.

“ Special engine honey, special engine. How the devil can there be a train with no carriages,” put in Captain O’Rourke.

“ Very well, special engine then ; but, to finish my story, Lady Maude, we arrived at Dover, and could learn nothing of you for a long time. At last, by accident, I heard you had been taken from the steamer which should have landed you in France, and conveyed on board a yacht, which was just leaving the harbour, and against your own will carried out to sea, to be taken I know not whither.”

“ To hire this clipper brig, get a crew, and sail in pursuit, did not take us long. As you know, we overhauled the yacht, took her by board, and made ourselves complete masters of her. And, now Lady Maude, you are free, safe from your enemies and persecutors. I have come to know where you would wish to be sent on shore.”

“ France! France! *la belle France*,” cried the young lady. “ Any town in France. I shall be safe there. Safe! safe!”

She was so exhausted and overjoyed at this sudden and unexpected rescue, as for a time to forget to express her thanks to her deliverers. But she soon recollected herself, and was as profuse in her expressions of gratitude as was possible.

“ I am only too happy to have been of any service to you said Roland Dane gallantly.”

“ Ah! Sir, how can I ever thank you enough; how can I ever hope to repay the service you and your friends have rendered me.”

“ Lady Maude, there is one thing which you can

do which will go far to repay any slight service I and my friends have rendered you."

"And that is?"

"Clear up the mystery which surrounds you. Let me know whom I have the honour of speaking to. Tell me the meaning of the persistent persecution you have suffered, and reveal the mystery of your terror and helplessness in the hands of Sir Robert Barclay?"

She was silent, and a slight shudder pervaded her.

"Alas! it is a sad story. A tale of my miseries and folly, and the wickedness and treachery of a near relation. Sir, it pains me to speak of it. When I stand on the shores of dear, darling France, I will write it."

"And you will tell me who you are?" he cried eagerly. "Tell me all?"

"I will."

"And I may see you again?"

"Ah!" she said, blushing, "I doubt not we shall meet again; it seems fated that we should; and you know," she added, smiling, "it is useless to fight against fate."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks. I will now leave you, and give directions for the vessel to be steered for Boulogne or Calais. For the present farewell."

"Au revoir," she said with a charming smile.

He took her hand, and, without resistance on her part, raised it to his lips and kissed it.

That night the Boncta anchored in Boulogne harbour.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LADY MAUDE was feverishly impatient to set foot on the shores of France, seeming not to consider herself safe until that had happened.

She at once took private apartments at the Hotel du Nord.

The brig was safely moored in the harbour, and a portion of the crew allowed to come on shore.

We need scarcely say that Roland Dane accompanied the fair fugitive to her hotel.

He left her at the door, however, after seeing that apartments were provided for her, thinking that she would be tired, and glad to go to rest, promising to visit her on the following day.

As for the yacht, her captain and Sir Robert Barclay consulted, and declared that in a few hours she would be repaired sufficiently to be made sea-worthy.

There was no reason for detaining her or Sir Robert Barclay even—so, late at night she put out to sea—ostensibly to return to England—and they saw her no more.

On the following morning about noon Roland Dane called on Lady Maude at her hotel.

He found her busily engaged in writing. She received him cordially, a flattering blush flying to her face, as he pressed her hand, and looked in her eyes.

“Ah! Mr. Dane—I am keeping my word—I am writing down my strange eventful history. Only,” she added with a smile, “you must promise me not to publish it.”

“Ah! Lady Maude, you know that I would do nothing which would possibly distress you. And now, may I ask what are your intended movements, and if I can be of any further assistance?”

“I shall write to my sister, and remain a few days for a reply. If I do not then hear, I shall start in quest of her. Fortunately, I am well provided with money. And, besides, the bankers here know me, for when I was at the convent I used to receive money through them.”

“Ah! then I hope to see you frequently, and I trust some day when you have left here, and rejoined your sister, you will, I hope, write to me, and let me know of your safe arrival, and allow me to write in return?”

“Ah! I cannot say, sir, I must be guided by others. Gracious Heavens! if I should, indeed, be declared by English and Scotch law the wife of that man, I should never more be able to return to England.”

She shuddered, and hid her face with her hands at the terrible thought.

After some little more talk he left her, promising to call again in the evening.

He then went to the livery stables, hired a horse and trap, and started with O'Rourke for a long country drive.

As to the Lady Maude, she finished writing the

history of the mystery, and then herself went for a walk into the town.

Roland Dane returned in the evening just at sun down, and, before going on board, called at the Hotel du Nord.

In answer to inquiries he was told Miladi had gone.

“Gone out you mean—she will be in presently I presume.”

“No Monsieur, Miladi has gone—gone altogether. She departed by the express train to Paris. But she has left a packet and a casket for you—Monsieur Roland Dane, I believe?”

He took the packet and casket, and going into the smoking room opened the former, and read her narrative all through.



CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LADY MAUDE'S NARRATIVE.—THE HISTORY OF
A MYSTERY.

“I WAS, as are many English young ladies, educated in a French convent, and there I obtained my knowledge of the Catholic religion, and imbibed a bias—a leaning to the Romish Church.

“I was left an orphan at fifteen—heiress to an immense fortune. For guardian I had no one but an old relative, who did not care for me, who indeed disliked me, and utterly neglected his duty to his ward.

“I left school—the French convent of which I spoke before—I was eighteen, and found myself almost absolutely my own mistress, with no female relations, and few lady friends even.

“I had unlimited command of money, although I should not come into absolute possession of my fortune until I should be one and twenty. I had no one to control me, no one to advise me, but was left to do exactly as I chose.

“My brother Algernon was, with the exception of my old guardian, I believe the only relation I had in the world. It was natural that I should cling to him, the only one of my family. He was poor, and frightfully extravagant, also dissipated, and I

fear a gambler. Nevertheless, I looked over his faults, and freely supplied him with money. At last his demands became so enormous that I could satisfy him no longer. It was impossible, for although I had more money at command than I could spend myself, I could not touch the principal of my fortune, and my extravagant brother was not content with hundreds of pounds, but required thousands—on one occasion as much as eight thousand pounds at a time.

“So I was obliged to refuse him. I made a firm and solemn resolution to give him no more money beyond the handsome sum I allowed him yearly—seven hundred pounds,—and I kept my word. He tried persuasion, threats—everything, and failed, for I can be determined when I choose.

“Then he left me in high dudgeon, which, however, he soon got over, as he found it convenient to live with me, and have the use of my servants, horses, carriages, and so forth.

“As for myself, it was necessary that I, a young girl of eighteen, should be living, nominally at least, under the same roof with some relation, so it suited me that Algernon should make my house his home

“After a time I made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Wyndham, a most kind and excellent lady, who offered to take me under her charge, to chaperon and protect me. So I arranged to live with her, and so was no longer dependent on my brother Algernon.

“I had also kept up the acquaintance of some young ladies who had been with me at the convent. All were Catholics; I was fascinated with the

religion, irresistibly attracted towards it, and finally had almost resolved to become a Catholic myself.

“It was about this time that my brother introduced to me his friend, Sir Robert Barclay, of whom he spoke in the highest terms.

“Alas! unhappy day for me!

“He had a good address, and when he chose, a most pleasing manner, and as my brother was always bringing him with him, a rather intimate acquaintance sprung up. I did not for some time imagine that he was seeking my hand, and when I did suspect that such was the case, I was not offended or displeased, for his manner was most respectful and deferential. But I never thought of him as a husband, never could so think of him, and when my brother once spoke to me on the subject, I told him so, plainly and distinctly.

“Doubtless he conveyed this to his friend. It did not however cause him to keep away from me in the least, and I thought that like a sensible man he had given up all such thoughts if he had ever entertained them.

“It was long before I knew the terrible fact which I am now compelled to write.

“My brother and the baronet were in league together to entrap me into a marriage, and for his assistance and complicity, my unworthy brother was to receive a share of my great fortune, which would accrue to Sir Robert, could I be proved to be legally his wife.

“My brother now encouraged me in my Roman Catholic leanings, and even accompanied me to

chapel, and made himself friendly with the priests, who visited me. Now I know the reason.

“Sir Robert Barclay was a Catholic, and it was necessary, in order to constitute a legal marriage, that a double ceremony should be performed, or that we should both be of the same religion.

“I was introduced to a young lady, the Hon. Mrs. Blanche Ponsonby—she was a Catholic, and I took a great liking to her; we were bosom friends.

“I know not whether she was an accomplice of Sir Robert Barclay’s. I should be sorry to accuse her of such infamy.

“This, however, is certain, that through her they gained their point, so far as my declaring myself a Catholic was concerned.

“It happened then, she urged and persuaded me to become a member of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. And finally I consented, and she proposed that I should signalize my conversion by the purchase of a handsome jewelled cross and rosary.

“She recommended me to her jeweller, and we drove to Streeter’s in Conduit-street, about the most fashionable makers in London—where we remained more than an hour—an easy task for ladies, looking at and admiring the many glittering gems and ornaments we were shown.

“Finally I ordered a Diamond Cross, a rosary and ivory crucifix, which amounted altogether to between eight and nine thousand pounds.

“A large sum, but then I considered I could afford it, and the diamonds being of the first water would always be worth their money.

“ Before leaving Miss Ponsonby remarked smilingly, by that, I had been converted to the Catholic religion.

“ I did not deny it.

“ And indeed that fatal fact was, I believe, the cause of all the misery I afterwards suffered, for I do not think he could have dared to claim me as his wife if I had not proposed too openly to be a Catholic.

“ And now I approach the close of my story, and have to narrate the infamous treachery of Sir Robert, and alas! that I should be obliged to say so, of my own brother.

“ I was in delicate health, the air of London not seeming to agree with me. My brother declared he was tired of his dissipated, fast life, and would dearly enjoy a month in the Highlands of Scotland.

“ I liked the idea, and he proposed that he should take me to Scotland, and we could, when we arrived, decide on where we would reside, probably hire some little cottage on the hills.

“ We went to Edinburgh, and put up at an hotel, and there we met Sir Robert Barclay. I was a little surprised, but suspected nothing, as I knew he had a seat and a moor in Scotland.

“ And by an extraordinary chance he told us he had a charming little furnished cottage on his estate, which would just suit us.

“ Suspecting nothing, I accepted his offer, only insisting on paying for the hire of the cottage. It was a charming little place, and for a time all went well. We were not without company, as Sir Robert had continually people staying at his great house at

AND HOW I WON IT.

Inveresk. Amongst the other Catholic Priests, whose acquaintance I had made, was one, Father Phillip. He used often to see me, nearly every day in fact, and instructed me in the doctrines and practices of the Catholic religion.

“ We used often to go on excursions in the hills and glens, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, at others with a light double dog cart, belonging to Sir Robert, which he insisted on placing at our service.

“ He himself often accompanied. On one occasion we went for a longer drive than usual. Something happened to the wheel of the conveyance (so I was told), and it was impossible we could return that day.

“ We had to put up at a roadside mountain inn. All the accommodation they could offer was a sitting-room and two bed-rooms.

“ Sir Robert said that would do capitally—that he was an old campaigner, and would sleep on the sofa in the sitting-room, while I could occupy the best room and Algernon the other.

“ I assented, and he engaged the rooms.

“ We were asked our names by the old Scotch hostess, to enter in her visitors book, a formality which she never neglected.

“ Algernon, as I thought when I discovered it, foolishly and in fun, wrote down for all of us, his own name, and that of Sir Robert Barclay and Lady Barclay.

“ Afterwards he addressed me as Lady Barclay, in presence of the woman, and asked her, laughingly, if we were not a good-looking couple.

“ Sir Robert, too, being in fun I supposed, though

I considered it a great liberty, or a piece of insolence on his part, addressed me somewhat in this way:—

“Lady Barclay, sweet wife, is there anything you would like before dinner.”

“I, fool that I was, not to rise and indignantly deny all this.

“I felt ashamed and confused, and retreated to my bed-chamber as quickly as I could.

“It communicated by a door with the sitting room, in which on a sofa Sir Robert slept.

“I locked and bolted my door, of course, and passed the night unmolested.

“But Sir Robert had gained his point. I had fallen blindfolded and helpless into the trap.

“The hostess and the servants did not imagine that Sir Robert occupied the sofa, I being his wife, Lady Barclay, as I suppose.

“He was up early, and ordered hot water to be brought to me, as though I had requested him to do so.”

“The deception was complete. But for the time I was in utter ignorance of the whole plot, and how completely I had fallen into the snare.

“Nor did I know till a month afterwards, when the storm burst.

“He tried all possible persuasion to induce me to accept him as my husband, and this failing he boldly declared I was his wife already, and to my utter dismay and consternation imprisoned me by force.

“I applied to the law.

“And then it was I knew the diabolical ingenuity and perfidy with which I had been entrapped,

“I had suffered myself to be called his wife both by him and my brother without contradicting it.

“And, moreover, the people at the inn supposed that he had occupied the same room.

“Whilst I had gone for a walk before breakfast Sir Robert had the audacity to enter my chamber and perform his toilette. He rang for the servant for more hot water whilst there.

“Altogether I was completely in the toils.

“Never was a scheme so cunningly planned—so cruelly and successfully carried out up to this point.

“The marriage law of Scotland declared I was the wife of Sir Robert Barclay, and he was entitled to the custody of me.

“By great good fortune I made my escape and fled to London.

“He pursued me and found me.

“And now I have come down to the time when you saved me from being again seized by him in St. James’s Park.

“You know the rest.”

* * * * *

“Not a word—not a line—not a message”—he said to himself, “ungrateful and heartless, like all her sex. Ah!” he cried, suddenly remembering the casket, “perhaps there is a letter in that.”

And so indeed there was.

“Dear friend—my honoured, respected champion and rescuer—I write just a few words in explanation.

“I must fly—at once—instantly! I have sent on

board the ship for you, but you were not there. I dare not remain a moment longer.

"I have seen him—he is in the town. I have seen him, though he did not see me—saw him enter the Hotel de Ville with French Police serjeants, doubtless to obtain an order from the Sous-Prefect, to find and seize me by force; once again—Adieu! We shall meet again. I wish to leave some memorial, some parting gift to each of your brave companions and to the men of your crew. To your friends I beg each to accept a bead of the rosary—every bead is a gem of the finest quality. To Captain O'Rourke, who, I believe is a Catholic, I bequeath the jewelled ivory crucifix. I also leave a Bank of France note for ten thousand francs, to be divided among your brave crew, and to you, my friend, my champion, my deliverer, I leave my best wishes and my prayers—I dare not write all my heart would dictate—and also, that which has been in a great measure the cause of all my misery—the Diamond Cross—for if I had never gone with Blanche Ponsonby to the jewellers in Conduit-street, I should never have owned myself a Catholic, and never could have been placed in this position. Hang the Diamond Cross round your neck, and wear it for my sake. We shall meet again, I feel—I know it. I must not, dare not, say more, for does not the law say I am the wife of Sir Robert Barclay. Ah! cruel law—were it not so—but I dare write no more—Adieu, and au revoir—remember me, and the Diamond Cross."

Roland Dane, Esq.

MAUDE.

Roland Dane took the magnificent jewelled cross in his hand, and gazed at it long and earnestly.

He shut the book, hung the cross round his neck, and left the hotel in a state of stupefaction, and went on board the brig.

“Alas! unhappy girl, unhappy fate, fear has infected her with needless panic. I feel sure that the French law would not allow him to seize her by force. But she has gone, and for the present all is over. She says we shall meet again—who knows? I almost wish I had not seen her, and yet I cannot regret it. Like a lovely phantom she appears across my path and is gone. No matter; we shall meet again.”

He went on board the brig and acquainted his companions of the departure of the lady, and the handsome keepsake she had left for each.

Among the crew he distributed the 10,000 francs, £400, to their intense delight and surprise.

Then turning to his friends and companions he said:—

“Gentlemen, in the morning I shall have a proposal to make. Let us all meet on the quarter-deck at sunrise.”

The morning came, and Roland Dane, standing on the gratings of the wheel, spoke as follows:—

“Gentlemen, we have carried out to a successful conclusion, a dangerous and exciting adventure. We have championed and rescued a distressed lady, and defeated the designs of a scoundrel. It argues well for our future career. Last night I read you the history of the persecutions and treachery with which

THE DIAMOND CROSS,

the unfortunate young lady was pursued, and which were partly owing to her purchase of the magnificent article of jewellery which she has presented to me as a souvenir, the Diamond Cross. Gentlemen, this vessel seems to me admirably adapted for our purpose. I propose that we purchase her, and having decided on our course of action and our next enterprise, that we equip her throughout, and sail away in search of profit and adventure. As to the Lady Maude," he added with a somewhat sad smile, "she says, in her letter to me, that we shall meet again. At all events we will not forget this adventure, and to keep it ever fresh in our minds I propose that if my suggestion be adopted, and we make the brig our own, that she be rechristened THE DIAMOND CROSS," He ceased, and his proposal was accepted by universal acclamation.

And that same afternoon there sailed out of Boulogne Harbour, a clipper brig, the Diamond Cross.

And here we must take leave of our friends and their vessel, hoping that all their adventures and enterprises may be brought to as successful an end as this one of the Lady Maude and the DIAMOND CROSS.

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